

UNCLE SILAS  
A TALE OF SARTAN HALL

COLLECTION  
OF  
BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. 782.

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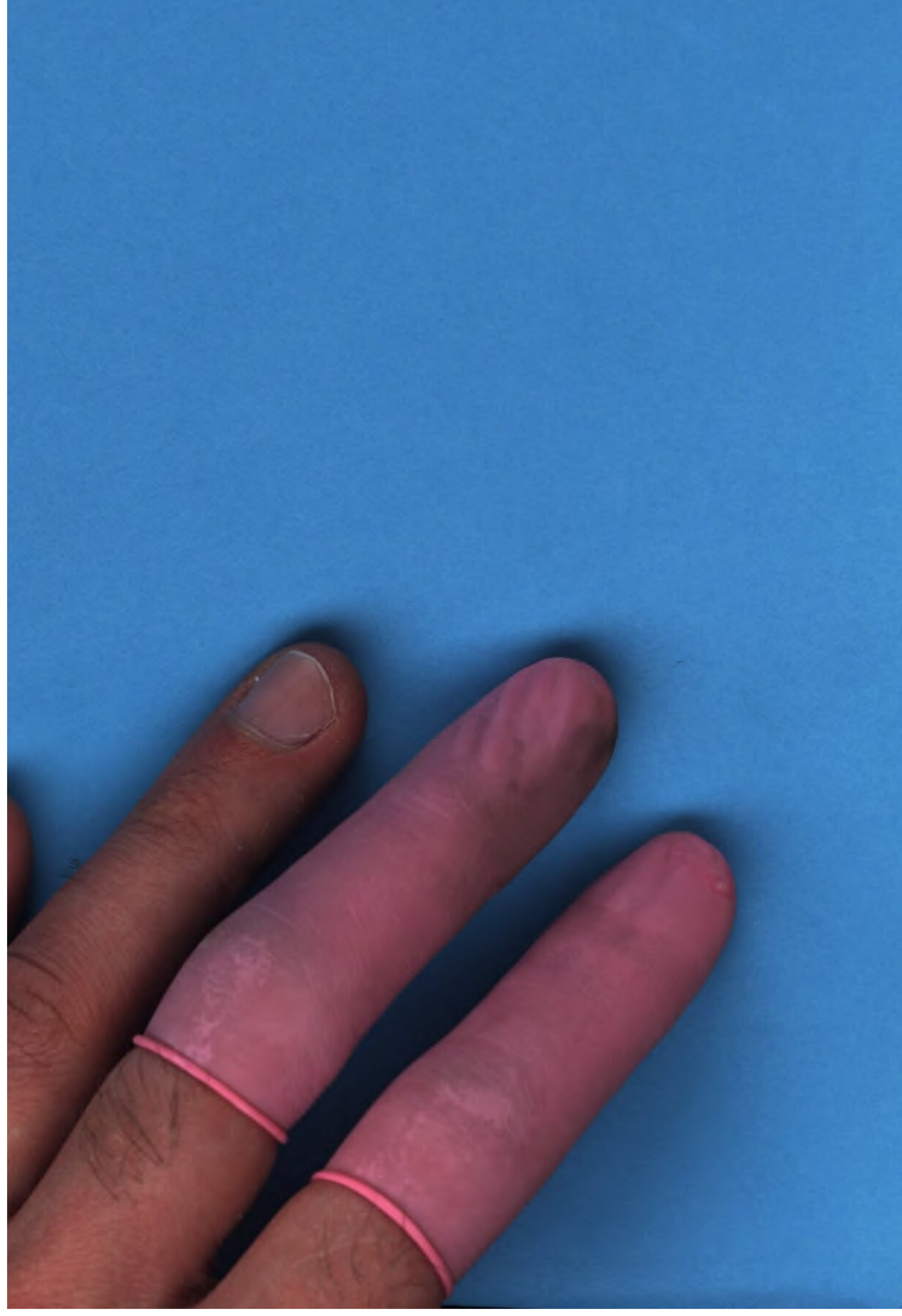
UNCLE SILAS BY J. S. LE FANU.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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1871



# UNCLE SILAS:

A TALE OF BARTRAM-HAUGH.

BY

J. S. LE FANU.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1865.

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A TALE OF BARTHEM-HAUGH.

J. S. LE FANU.

COMPLETE EDITION.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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LONDON:

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# UNCLE SILAS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### An Arrival at Dead of Night.

I HAVE sometimes been asked why I wear an odd little tourquoise ring — which to the uninstructed eye appears quite valueless and altogether an unworthy companion of those jewels which flash insultingly beside it. It is a little keepsake, of which I became possessed about this time.

"Come, lass, what name shall I give you," cried Milly, one morning, bursting into my room in a state of alarming hilarity.

"My own, Milly."

"No, but you mus thave a nickname, like every one else."

"Don't mind it, Milly."

"Yes, but I will. Shall I call you Mrs. Bustle?"

"You shall do no such thing."

"But you must have a name."

"I refuse a name."

"But I'll give you one, lass."

"And I won't have it."

"But you can't help me christening you."

"I can decline answering."

"But I'll make you," said Milly, growing very red.



Perhaps there was something provoking in my tone, for I certainly was very much disgusted at Milly's relapse into barbarism.

"You can't," I retorted quietly.

"See if I don't, and I'll give ye one twice as ugly."

I smiled, I fear disdainfully.

"And I think you're a minx, and a slut, and a fool," she broke out, flushing scarlet.

I smiled in the same unchristian way.

"And I'd give ye a smack o' the cheek as soon as look at you."

And she gave her dress a great slap, and drew near me, in her wrath. I really thought she was about tendering the ordeal of single combat.

I made her, however, a paralysing courtesy, and, with immense dignity, sailed out of the room, and into Uncle Silas's study, where it happened we were to breakfast that morning, and for several subsequent ones.

During the meal we maintained the most dignified reserve; and I don't think either so much as looked at the other.

We had no walk together that day.

I was sitting in the evening, quite alone, when Milly entered the room. Her eyes were red, and she looked very sullen.

"I want your hand, Cousin," she said, at the same time taking it by the wrist, and administering with it a sudden slap on her plump cheek, which made the room ring, and my fingers tingle; and before I had recovered from my surprise, she had vanished.

I called after her, but no answer; I pursued, but



she was running too; and I quite lost her at the cross galleries.

I did not see her at tea, nor before going to bed; but after I had fallen asleep I was awakened by Milly, in floods of tears.

"Cousin Maud, will ye forgi' me — you'll never like me again, will ye? No — I know ye won't — I'm such a brute — I hate it — it's a shame. And here's a Banbury cake for you — I sent to the town for it, and some taffy — won't ye eat it? and here's a little ring — 't isn't as pretty as your own rings; and ye'll wear it, maybe, for my sake — poor Milly's sake, before I was so bad to ye — if ye forgi' me; and I'll look at breakfast, and if it's on your finger I'll know you're friends wi' me again; and if ye don't, I won't trouble you no more; and I think I'll just drown myself out o' the way, and you'll never see wicked Milly no more."

And without waiting a moment, leaving me only half awake, and with the sensations of dreaming, she scampered from the room, in her bare feet, with a petticoat about her shoulders.

She had left her candle by my bed, and her little offerings on the coverlet by me. If I had stood an atom less in terror of goblins than I did, I should have followed her, but I was afraid. I stood in my bare feet at my bed-side, and kissed the poor little ring and put it on my finger, where it has remained ever since and always shall. And when I lay down, longing for morning, the image of her pale, imploring penitential face was before me for hours; and I repented bitterly of my cool provoking ways, and thought



myself, I dare say justly, a thousand times more to blame than Milly.

I searched in vain for her before breakfast. At that meal, however, we met, but in the presence of Uncle Silas, who, though silent and apathetic, was formidable; and we, sitting at a table disproportionably large, under the cold, strange gaze of my guardian, talked only what was inevitable, and that in low tones; for whenever Milly for a moment raised her voice, Uncle Silas would wince, place his thin white fingers quickly over his ear, and look as if a pain had pierced his brain, and then shrug and smile piteously into vacancy. When Uncle Silas, therefore, was not in the talking vein himself — and that was not often — you may suppose there was very little spoken in his presence.

When Milly, across the table, saw the ring upon my finger, she, drawing in her breath, said “Oh!” and, with round eyes and mouth, she looked so delighted; and she made a little motion, as if she was on the point of jumping up; and then her poor face quivered, and she bit her lip; and staring imploringly at me, her eyes filled fast with tears, which rolled down her round penitential cheeks.

I am sure I felt more penitent than she. I know I was crying and smiling, and longing to kiss her. I suppose we were very absurd; but it is well that small matters can stir the affections so profoundly at a time of life when great troubles seldom approach us.

When at length the opportunity did come, never was such a hug out of the wrestling ring as poor Milly bestowed on me, swaying me this way and that, and burying her face in my dress, and blubbering —



"I was so lonely before you came, and you so good to me, and I such a devil; and I'll never call you a name, but Maud — my darling Maud."

"You must, Milly — Mrs. Bustle. I'll be Mrs. Bustle, or anything you like. You must." I was blubbering like Milly, and hugging my best; and, indeed, I wonder how we kept our feet.

So Milly and I were better friends than ever.

Meanwhile, the winter deepened, and we had short days and long nights, and long fireside gossipings at Bartram-Haugh. I was frightened at the frequency of the strange collapses to which Uncle Silas was subject. I did not at first mind them much, for I naturally fell into Milly's way of talking about them.

But one day, while in one of his "queerish" states, he called for me, and I saw him, and was unspeakably scared.

In a white wrapper, he lay coiled in a great easy chair. I should have thought him dead had I not been accompanied by old L'Amour, who knew every gradation and symptom of these strange affections.

She winked and nodded to me with a ghastly significance, and whispered —

"Don't make no noise, Miss, till he talks; he'll come to for a bit, anon."

Except that there was no sign of convulsions, the countenance was like that of an epileptic arrested in one of its contortions.

There was a frown and smirk like that of idiotcy, and a strip of white eyeball was also disclosed.

Suddenly, with a kind of chilly shudder, he opened his eyes wide, and screwed his lips together, and



blinked and stared on me with a fatuized uncertainty, that gradually broke into a feeble smile.

"Ah! the girl — Austin's child. Well, dear, I'm hardly able — I'll speak to-morrow — next day — it is tic — neuralgia, or something — *torture* — tell her."

So, huddling himself together, he lay again in his great chair, with the same inexpressible helplessness in his attitude, and gradually his face resumed its dreadful cast.

"Come away, Miss: he's changed his mind; he'll not be fit to talk to you noways all day, maybe," said the old woman, again in a whisper.

So forth we stole from the room, I unspeakably shocked. In fact, he looked as if he were dying, and so, in my agitation, I told the crone, who, forgetting the ceremony with which she usually treated me, chuckled out derisively,

"A dying is he? Well, he be like Saint Paul — he's bin a dying daily this many a day."

I looked at her with a chill of horror. She did not care, I suppose, what sort of feelings she might excite, for she went on mumbling sarcastically to herself. I had paused, and overcame my reluctance to speak to her again, for I was really very much frightened.

"Do you think he is in danger? Shall we send for a doctor?" I whispered.

"Law bless ye, the doctor knows all about it, Miss." The old woman's face had a gleam of that derision which is so shocking in the features of feebleness and age.

"But it is a *fit*, it is paralytic, or something horrible — it can't be *safe* to leave him to chance or nature to get through these terrible attacks."



"There's no fear of him, 't isn't no fits at all, he's nout the worse o't. Jest silly a bit now and again. It's been the same a dozen year and more; and the doctor knows all about it," answered the old woman sturdily. "And ye'll find he'll be as mad as bedlam if ye make any stir about it."

That night I talked the matter over with Mary Quince.

"They're very dark, Miss; but I think he takes a deal too much laudlum," said Mary.

To this hour I cannot say what was the nature of those periodical seizures. I have often spoken to medical men about them, since, but never could learn that excessive use of opium could altogether account for them. It was, I believe, certain, however, that he did use that drug in startling quantities. It was, indeed, sometimes a topic of complaint with him that his neuralgia imposed this sad necessity upon him.

The image of Uncle Silas, as I had seen him that day, troubled and affrighted my imagination, as I lay in my bed; I had slept very well since my arrival at Bartram. So much of the day was passed in the open air, and in active exercise, that this was but natural. But that night I was nervous and wakeful, and it was past two o'clock when I fancied I heard the sound of horses and carriage-wheels on the avenue.

Mary Quince was close by, and therefore, I was not afraid to get up and peep from the window. My heart beat fast as I saw a post-chaise approach the court-yard. A front window was let down, and the postilion pulled up for a few seconds.

In consequence of some directions received by him, I fancied he resumed his route at a walk, and so drew



up at the hall-door, on the steps of which a figure awaited its arrival. I think it was old L'Amour, but I could not be quite certain. There was a lantern on the top of the balustrade, close by the door. The chaise-lamps were lighted, for the night was rather dark.

A bag and valise, as well as I could see, were pulled from the interior by the post-boy, and a box from the top of the vehicle, and these were carried into the hall.

I was obliged to keep my cheek against the window-pane to command a view of the point of debarkation, and my breath upon the glass, which dimmed it again almost as fast as I wiped it away, helped to obscure my vision. But I saw a tall figure, in a cloak, get down and swiftly enter the house, but whether male or female I could not discern.

My heart beat fast. I jumped at once to a conclusion. My uncle was worse — was, in fact, dying; and this was the physician, too late summoned to his bedside.

I listened for the ascent of the doctor, and his entrance at my uncle's door, which, in the stillness of the night, I thought I might easily hear, but no sound reached me. I listened so for fully five minutes, but without result. I returned to the window, but the carriage and horses had disappeared.

I was strongly tempted to wake Mary Quince, and take counsel with her, and persuade her to undertake a reconnoissance. The fact is, I was persuaded that my uncle was in extremity, and I was quite wild to know the doctor's opinion. But after all, it would be cruel to summon the good soul from her refreshing nap. So, as I began to feel very cold, I returned to



my bed, where I continued to listen and conjecture until I fell asleep.

In the morning, as was usual, before I was dressed, in came Milly.

"How is Uncle Silas?" I eagerly inquired.

"Old L'Amour says he's queerish still; but he's not so dull as yesterday," answered she.

"Was not the doctor sent for?" I asked.

"Was he? Well that's odd; and she said never a word o't to me," answered she.

"I'm asking only," said I.

"I don't know whether he came or no," she replied; "but what makes you take that in your head?"

"A chaise arrived here between two and three o'clock last night."

"Hey! and who told you?" Milly seemed all on a sudden highly interested.

"I saw it, Milly; and some one, I fancy the doctor, came from it into the house."

"Fudge, lass! who'd send for the doctor? 'Twasn't he, I tell you. What was he like?" said Milly.

"I could only see clearly that he, or *she*, was tall, and wore a cloak," I replied.

"Then twasn't him nor t'other I was thinking on, neither; and I'll be hanged but I think it will be Cormoran," cried Milly, with a thoughtful rap with her knuckle on the table.

Precisely at this juncture a tapping came to the door.

"Come in," said I.

And old L'Amour entered the room, with a courtesy.

"I came to tell Miss Quince her breakfast's ready," said the old lady.



"Who came in the chaise, L'Amour?" demanded Milly.

"What chaise?" spluttered the beldame tartly.

"The chaise that came last night, past two o'clock," said Milly.

"That's a lie, and a damn lie!" cried the beldame. "There worn't no chaise at the door since Miss Maud there come from Knowl."

I stared at the audacious old menial who could utter such language.

"Yes, there was a chaise, and Cormoran, as I think, be come in it," said Milly, who seemed accustomed to L'Amour's daring address.

"And there's another damn lie, as big as the t'other," said the crone, her haggard and withered face flushing orange all over.

"I beg you will not use such language in my room," I replied, very angrily. "I *saw* the chaise at the door; your untruth signifies very little, but your impertinence, here, I will not permit. Should it be repeated, I will assuredly complain to my uncle."

The old woman flushed more fiercely as I spoke, and fixed her bleared glare on me, with a compression of her mouth that amounted to a wicked grimace. She resisted her angry impulse, however, and only chuckled a little spitefully, saying,

"No offence, Miss: it be a way we has in Derbyshire o' speaking our minds. No offence, Miss, were meant, and none took, as I hopes," and she made me another courtesy.

"And I forgot to tell you, Miss Milly, the Master wants you this minute."

So Milly, in mute haste, withdrew, followed closely by L'Amour.



## CHAPTER II.

Doctor Bryerly Emerges.

WHEN Milly joined me at breakfast, her eyes were red and swollen. She was still sniffing with that little sobbing hiccough, which betrays, even were there no other signs, recent violent weeping. She sat down quite silent.

"Is he worse, Milly?" I inquired, anxiously.

"No, nothing's wrong wi' him; he's right well," said Milly; fiercely.

"What's the matter then, Milly dear?"

"The poisonous old witch! 'Twas just to tell the gov'nor how I'd said 'twas Cormoran that came by the po'-shay last night."

"And who is Cormoran?" I inquired.

"Ay, there it is, I'd like to tell, and you want to hear — and I just daren't, for he'll send me off right to a French school — hang it — hang them all! — if I do."

"And why should Uncle Silas care?" said I, a good deal surprised.

"They're a tellin' lies."

"Who?" said I.

"L'Amour — that's who. So soon as she made her complaint of me, the Gov'nor asked her, sharp enough, did any one come last night, or a po'shay; and she was ready to swear there was no one. Are ye quite sure, Maud, you really did see aught, or 'appen 'twas all a dream?"



"It was no dream, Milly; so sure as you are there, I saw exactly what I told you," I replied.

"Gov'nor won't believe it anyhow; and he's right mad wi' me; and he threatens me he'll have me off to France; I wish 'twas under the sea. I hate France — I do — like the devil. Don't you? They're always a-threatening me wi' France, if I dare say a word more about the po'shay, or — or anyone."

I really was curious about Cormoran; but Cormoran was not to be defined to me by Milly; nor did she, in reality, know more than I respecting the arrival of the night before.

One day I was surprised to see Doctor Bryerly on the stairs. I was standing in a dark gallery as he walked across the floor of the lobby to my uncle's door, his hat on, and some papers in his hand.

He did not see me; and when he had entered Uncle Silas's door, I went down and found Milly awaiting me in the hall.

"So Doctor Bryerly is here," I said.

"That's the thin fellow, wi' the sharp look, and the shiny black coat, that went up just now?" asked Milly.

"Yes, he's gone into your papa's room," said I.

"'Appen 'twas he come 'tother night. He may be staying here, though we see him seldom, for it's a barrack of a house — it is."

The same thought had struck me for a moment, but was dismissed immediately. It certainly was *not* Doctor Bryerly's figure which I had seen.

So, without any new light gathered from this apparition, we went on our way, and made our little sketch of the ruined bridge. We found the gate locked



as before; and, as Milly could not persuade me to climb it, we got round the paling by the river's bank.

While at our drawing, we saw the swarthy face, sooty locks, and old weather-stained red coat of Zamiel, who was glowering malignly at us from among the trunks of the forest trees, and standing motionless as a monumental figure in the side aisle of a cathedral. When we looked again he was gone.

Although it was a fine mild day for the wintry season, we yet, cloaked as we were, could not pursue so still an occupation as sketching for more than ten or fifteen minutes. As we returned, in passing a clump of trees, we heard a sudden outbreak of voices, angry and expostulatory; and saw, under the trees, the savage old Zamiel strike his daughter with his stick two great blows, one of which was across the head. "Beauty" ran only a short distance away, while the swart old wood-demon stumped lustily after her, cursing and brandishing his cudgel.

My blood boiled. I was so shocked that for a moment I could not speak; but in a moment more I screamed —

"You brute! How dare you strike the poor girl?"

She had only run a few steps, and turned about confronting him and us, her eyes gleaming fire, her features pale and quivering to suppress a burst of weeping. Two little rivulets of blood were trickling over her temple.

"I say, fayther, look at that," she said, with a strange tremulous smile, lifting her hand, which was smeared with blood.

Perhaps he was ashamed, and the more enraged on that account, for he growled another curse, and started



afresh to reach her, whirling his stick in the air. Our voices, however, arrested him.

"My uncle shall hear of your brutality. The poor girl!"

"Strike him, Meg, if he does it again; and pitch his leg into the river to-night, when he's asleep."

"I'd serve *you* the same;" and out came an oath. "You'd have her lick her fayther, would ye? Look out!"

And he wagged his head, with a scowl at Milly, and a flourish of his cudgel.

"Be quiet, Milly," I whispered, for Milly was preparing for battle; and I again addressed him with the assurance that, on reaching home, I would tell my uncle how he had treated the poor girl.

"'Tis you she may thank for't, a wheedling o' her to open that gate," he snarled.

"That's a lie; we went round by the brook," cried Milly.

I did not think proper to discuss the matter with him; and looking very angry, and, I thought, a little put out, he jerked and swayed himself out of sight. I merely repeated my promise of informing my uncle as he went, to which, over his shoulder, he bawled —

"Silas won't mind ye *that*;" snapping his horny finger and thumb.

The girl remained where she had stood, wiping the blood off roughly with the palm of her hand, and looking at it before she rubbed it on her apron.

"My poor girl," I said, "you must not cry. I'll speak to my uncle about you."

But she was not crying. She raised her head, and



looked at us a little askance, with a sullen contempt, I thought.

"And you must have these apples — won't you?" We had brought in our basket two or three of those splendid apples for which Bartram was famous.

I hesitated to go near her, these Hawkeses, Beauty and Pegtop, were such savages. So I rolled the apples gently along the ground to her feet.

She continued to look doggedly at us with the same expression, and kicked away the apples sullenly that approached her feet. Then, wiping her temple and forehead in her apron, without a word, she turned and walked slowly away.

"Poor thing! I'm afraid she leads a hard life. What strange, repulsive people they are!"

When we reached home, at the head of the great staircase old L'Amour was awaiting me; and with a courtesy, and very respectfully, she informed me that the Master would be happy to see me.

Could it be about my evidence as to the arrival of the mysterious chaise that he summoned me to this interview. Gentle as were his ways, there was something undefinable about Uncle Silas which inspired fear; and I should have liked few things less than meeting his gaze in the character of a culprit.

There was an uncertainty, too, as to the state in which I might find him, and a positive horror of beholding him again in the condition in which I had last seen him.

I entered the room, then, in some trepidation, but was instantly relieved. Uncle Silas was in the same health apparently, and, as nearly as I could recollect



it, in precisely the same rather handsome though negligent garb in which I had first seen him.

Doctor Bryerly — what a marked and vulgar contrast, and yet, somehow, how reassuring! — sat at the table near him, and was tying up papers. His eyes watched me, I thought, with an anxious scrutiny, as I approached; and I think it was not until I had saluted him that he recollected suddenly that he had not seen me before at Bartram, and stood up and greeted me in his usual abrupt and somewhat familiar way. It was vulgar and not cordial, and yet it was honest and indefinably kind.

Up rose my uncle, that strangely venerable pale portrait, in his loose Rembrandt black velvet. How gentle, how benignant, how unearthly, and inscrutable!

“I need not say how she is. Those lilies and roses, Doctor Bryerly, speak their own beautiful praises of the air of Bartram. I almost regret that her carriage will be home so soon. I only hope it may not abridge her rambles. It positively does me good to look at her. It is the glow of flowers in winter, and the fragrance of a field which the Lord hath blessed.”

“Country air, Miss Ruthyn, is a right good kitchen to country fare. I like to see young women eat heartily. You have had some pounds of beef and mutton since I saw you last,” said Doctor Bryerly.

And this sly speech made, he scrutinized my countenance in silence rather embarrassingly.

“My system, Doctor Bryerly, as a disciple of Æsculapius you will approve — health first, accomplishment afterwards. The Continent is the best field for elegant instruction, and we must see the world a little, by-and-by, Maud; and to me, if my health be



spared, there would be an unspeakable, though a melancholy charm in the scenes where so many happy, though so many wayward and foolish young days were passed; and I think I should return to these picturesque solitudes, with, perhaps, an increased relish. You remember old Chaulieu's sweet lines —

'Désert, aimable solitude,  
Séjour du calme et de la paix,  
Asile où n'entrèrent jamais  
Le tumulte et l'inquiétude.'

I can't say that care and sorrow have not sometimes penetrated these sylvan fastnesses; but the tumults of the world, thank Heaven! — never."

There was a sly scepticism, I thought, in Doctor Bryerly's sharp face; and hardly waiting for the impressive "never," he said —

"I forgot to ask, who is your banker?"

"Oh! Bartlet and Hall, Lombard-street," answered Uncle Silas, dryly and shortly.

Dr. Bryerly made a note of it, with an expression of face which seemed, with a sly resolution, to say, "You shan't come the anchorite over me."

I saw Uncle Silas's wild and piercing eye rest suspiciously on me for a moment, as if to ascertain whether I felt the spirit of Doctor Bryerly's almost interruption; and, nearly at the same moment, stuffing his papers into his capacious coat pockets, Doctor Bryerly rose and took his leave.

When he was gone, I bethought me that now was a good opportunity of making my complaint of Dickon Hawkes. Uncle Silas having risen, I hesitated, and began,



"Uncle, may I mention an occurrence — which I witnessed?"

"Certainly, child," he answered, fixing his eye sharply on me. I really think he fancied that the conversation was about to turn upon the phantom chaise.

So I described the scene which had shocked Milly and me, an hour or so ago, in the Windmill Wood.

"You see, my dear child, they are rough persons; their ideas are not ours; their young people must be chastised, and in a way and to a degree that we would look upon in a serious light. I've found it a bad plan interfering in strictly domestic misunderstandings, and should rather not."

"But he struck her violently on the head, Uncle, with a heavy cudgel, and she was bleeding very fast."

"Ah?" said my uncle, dryly.

"And only that Milly and I deterred him by saying that we would certainly tell you, he would have struck her again; and I really think if he goes on treating her with so much violence and cruelty he may injure her very seriously, or perhaps kill her."

"Why, you romantic little child, people in that rank of life think absolutely nothing of a broken head," answered Uncle Silas, in the same way.

"But is it not horrible brutality, Uncle?"

"To be sure it is brutality; but then you must remember they are brutes, and it suits them," said he.

I was disappointed. I had fancied that Uncle Silas's gentle nature would have recoiled from such an outrage with horror and indignation; and instead, here he was, the apologist of that savage ruffian, Dickon Hawkes.

"And he is always so rude and impertinent to Milly and to me," I continued.



"Oh! impertinent to you — that's another matter. I must see to that. Nothing more, my dear child?"

"Well, there *was* nothing more."

"He's a useful servant, Hawkes; and though his looks are not prepossessing, and his ways and language rough, yet he is a very kind father, and a most honest man — a thoroughly moral man, though severe — a very rough diamond though, and has no idea of the refinements of polite society. I venture to say he honestly believes that he has been always unexceptionably polite to you, so we must make allowances."

And Uncle Silas smoothed my hair with his thin aged hand, and kissed my forehead.

"Yes, we must make allowances, we must be kind. What says the Book? — 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.' Your dear father acted upon that maxim — so noble and so awful — and I strive to do so. Alas! dear Austin, *longo intervallo*, far behind! and you are gone to your rest, and I remain beneath my burden, still marching on by bleak and alpine paths, under the awful night.

'O nuit, nuit douloureuse! O toi, tardive aurore,  
Viens-tu? vas-tu venir? est-tu bien loin encore?'"

And repeating these lines of Chenier, with upturned eyes, and one hand lifted, and an indescribable expression of grief and fatigue, he sank stiffly into his chair, and remained mute, with eyes closed for some time. Then applying his scented handkerchief to them hastily, and looking very kindly at me, he said —

"Anything more, dear child?"

"Nothing, Uncle, thank you, very much, only about that man, Hawkes; I dare say that he does not mean to be so uncivil as he is, but I am really afraid



of him, and he makes our walks in that direction quite unpleasant."

"I understand quite, my dear. I will see to it; and you must remember that nothing is to be allowed to vex my beloved niece and ward during her stay at Bartram — nothing that her old kinsman, Silas Ruthyn, can remedy."

So with a tender smile, and a charge to shut the door "perfectly, but without clapping it," he dismissed me.

Doctor Bryerly had not slept at Bartram, but at the little inn in Feltram, and he was going direct to London, as I afterwards learned.

"Your ugly Doctor's gone away in a fly," said Milly, as we met on the stairs, she running up, I down.

On reaching the little apartment which was our sitting-room, however, I found that she was mistaken, for Doctor Bryerly, with his hat and a great pair of woollen gloves on, and an old Oxford gray surtout that showed his lank length to advantage, buttoned all the way up to his chin, had set down his black leather bag on the table, and was reading at the window a little volume which I had borrowed from my uncle's library.

It was Swedenborg's account of the other worlds, Heaven and Hell.

He closed it on his finger as I entered, and without recollecting to remove his hat, he made a step or two toward me with his splay, creaking boots. With a quick glance at the door, he said —

"Glad to see you alone for a minute — very glad."

But his countenance, on the contrary, looked very anxious.



## CHAPTER III.

## A Midnight Departure.

"I'm going this minute — I — I want to know" — another glance at the door — "are you really quite comfortable here?"

"Quite," I answered promptly.

"You have only your cousin's company?" he continued, glancing at the table, which was laid for two.

"Yes; but Milly and I are very happy together."

"That's very nice; but I think there are no teachers, you see — painters, and singers, and that sort of thing that is usual with young ladies. No teachers of that kind — of *any* kind — are there?"

"No; my uncle thinks it better I should lay in a store of health, he says."

"I know; and the carriage and horses have not come; how soon are they expected?"

"I really can't say, and I assure you I don't much care. I think running about great fun."

"You walk to church?"

"Yes, Uncle Silas's carriage wants a new wheel, he told me."

"Ay, but a young woman of your rank, you know, it is not usual she should be without the use of a carriage. Have you horses to ride?"

I shook my head.

"Your uncle, you know, has a very liberal allowance for your maintenance and education."



I remembered something in the will about it, and Mary Quince was constantly grumbling that "he did not spend a pound a week on our board."

I answered nothing, but looked down.

Another glance at the door from Doctor Bryerly's sharp black eyes.

"Is he kind to you?"

"Very kind — most gentle and affectionate."

"Why doesn't he keep company with you? Does he ever dine with you, or drink tea, or talk to you? Do you see much of him?"

"He is a miserable invalid — his hours and regimen are peculiar. Indeed I wish very much you would consider his case; he is, I believe, often insensible for a long time, and his mind in a strange feeble state sometimes."

"I dare say — worn out in his young days; and I saw that preparation of opium in his bottle — he takes too much."

"Why do you think so, Doctor Bryerly?"

"It's made on water: the spirit interferes with the use of it beyond a certain limit. You have no idea what those fellows can swallow. Read the 'Opium Eater.' I knew two cases in which the quantity exceeded De Quincy's. Aha! it's new to you?" and he laughed quietly at my simplicity.

"And what do you think his complaint is?" I asked.

"Pooh! I haven't a notion; but probably, one way or another, he has been all his days working on his nerves and his brain. These men of pleasure, who have no other pursuit, use themselves up mostly, and pay a smart price for their sins. And so he's kind and



affectionate, but hands you over to your cousin and the servants. Are his people civil and obliging?"

"Well, I can't say much for them; there is a man named Hawkes, and his daughter, who are very rude, and even abusive sometimes, and say they have orders from my uncle to shut us out from a portion of the grounds; but I don't believe that, for Uncle Silas never alluded to it when I was making my complaint of them to-day."

"From what part of the grounds is that?" asked Doctor Bryerly, sharply.

I described the situation as well as I could.

"Can we see it from this?" he asked, peeping from the window.

"Oh, no."

Doctor Bryerly made a note in his pocket-book here, and I said —

"But I am really quite sure it was a story of Dickon's, he is such a surly, disobliging man."

"And what sort is that old servant that came in and out of his room?"

"Oh, that is old L'Amour," I answered, rather indirectly, and forgetting that I was using Milly's nickname.

"And is *she* civil?" he asked.

No, she certainly was not; a most disagreeable old woman, with a vein of wickedness. I thought I had heard her swearing.

"They don't seem to be a very engaging lot," said Doctor Bryerly; "but where there's one, there will be more. See here, I was just reading a passage," and he opened the little volume at the place where his finger marked it, and read for me a few sentences, the



purport of which I well remember, although, of course, the words have escaped me.

It was in that awful portion of the book which assumes to describe the condition of the condemned; and it said, that independently of the physical causes in that state operating to enforce community of habitation, and an isolation from superior spirits, there exist sympathies, aptitudes, and necessities which would, of themselves, induce that depraved gregariousness, and isolation too.

“And what of the rest of the servants, are they better?” he resumed.

We saw little or nothing of the others, except of old “Giblets,” the butler, who went about like a little automaton of dry bones, poking here and there, and whispering and smiling to himself as he laid the cloth; and seeming otherwise quite unconscious of an external world.

“This room is not got up like Mr. Ruthyn’s: does he talk of furnishing and making things a little smart? No! Well, I must say, I think he might.”

Here there was a little silence, and Doctor Bryerly, with his accustomed simultaneous glance at the door, said in low, cautious tones, very distinctly —

“Have you been thinking at all over that matter again, I mean about getting your uncle to forego his guardianship? I would not mind his first refusal. You could make it worth his while, unless he — that is — unless he’s very unreasonable indeed; and I think you would consult your interest, Miss Ruthyn, by doing so, and, if possible, getting out of this place.”

“But I have not thought of it at all; I am much



happier here than I had at all expected, and I am very fond of my Cousin Milly."

"How long have you been here exactly?"

I told him. It was some two or three months.

"Have you seen your other cousin, yet — the young gentleman?"

"No."

"H'm! Aren't you very lonely?" he inquired.

"We see no visitors here; but that, you know, I was prepared for."

Doctor Bryerly read the wrinkles on his splay boot intently and peevishly, and tapped the sole lightly on the ground.

"Yes, it is very lonely, and the people a bad lot. You'd be pleasanter somewhere else — with Lady Knollys, for instance, eh?"

"Well, *there* certainly. But I am very well here: really the time passes very pleasantly; and my uncle is so kind. I have only to mention anything that annoys me, and he will see that it is remedied; he is always impressing that on me."

"Yes, it is not a fit place for you," said Doctor Bryerly. "Of course, about your uncle," he resumed, observing my surprised look, "it is all right; but he's quite helpless, you know. At all events, *think* about it. Here's my address — Hans Emmanuel Bryerly, M.D., 17, Kingstreet, Covent Garden, London — don't lose it, mind," and he tore the leaf out of his note-book.

"Here's my fly at the door, and you must — you must" (he was looking at his watch) — "mind you *must* think of it seriously; and so, you see, don't let anyone see that. You'll be sure to leave it throwing about. The best way will be just to scratch it on the



door of your press, inside, you know; and don't put my name — you'll remember that — only the rest of the address; and burn this. Quince is with you?"

"Yes," I answered, glad to have a satisfactory word to say.

"Well, don't let her go; it's a bad sign if they wish it. Don't consent, mind; but just tip me a hint, and you'll have me down. And any letters you get from Lady Knollys, you know, for she's very plain-spoken, you'd better burn them off-hand. And I've stayed too long, though; mind what I say, scratch it with a pin, and burn that, and not a word to a mortal about it. Good-bye; oh, I was taking away your book."

And so, in a fuss, with a slight shake of the hand, getting up his umbrella, his bag, and tin box, he hurried from the room; and in a minute more, I heard the sound of his vehicle as it drove away.

I looked after it with a sigh: the uneasy sensations which I had experienced respecting my sojourn at Bartram-Haugh were re-awakened.

My ugly, vulgar, true friend was disappearing beyond those gigantic lime trees which hid Bartram from the eyes of the outer world. The fly, with the Doctor's valise on top, vanished, and I sighed an anxious sigh. The shadow of the over-arching trees contracted, and I felt helpless and forsaken; and glancing down the torn leaf, Doctor Bryerly's address met my eye, between my fingers.

I slipped it into my breast, and ran up-stairs stealthily, trembling lest the old woman should summon me again, at the head of the stairs, into Uncle Silas's room, where under his gaze, I fancied, I should be sure to betray myself.



But I glided unseen and safely by, entered my room, and shut my door. So, listening and working, I, with my scissors' point, scratched the address where Doctor Bryerly had advised. Then, in positive terror, lest some one should even knock during the operation, I, with a match, consumed to ashes the tell-tale bit of paper.

Now, for the first time, I experienced the unpleasant sensations of having a secret to keep. I fancy the pain of this solitary liability was disproportionately acute in my case, for I was naturally very open and very nervous. I was always on the point of betraying it *apropos des bottes* — always reproaching myself for my duplicity; and in constant terror when honest Mary Quince approached the press, or good-natured Milly made her occasional survey of the wonders of my wardrobe. I would have given anything to go and point to the tiny inscription, and say: — "This is Doctor Bryerly's address in London. I scratched it with my scissors' point, taking every precaution lest any one — you, my good friends, included — should surprise me. I have ever since kept this secret to myself, and trembled whenever your frank kind faces looked into the press. There — you at last know all about it. Can you ever forgive my deceit?"

But I could not make up my mind to reveal it; nor yet to erase the inscription, which was my alternative thought. Indeed I am a wavering, irresolute creature as ever lived, in my ordinary mood. High excitement or passion only can inspire me with decision. Under the inspiration of either, however, I am transformed, and often both prompt and brave.

"Some one left here last night, I think, Miss,"



said Mary Quince, with a mysterious nod, one morning. "'Twas two o'clock, and I was bad with the tooth-ache, and went down to get a pinch o' red pepper — leaving the candle a-light here lest you should awake. When I was coming up — as I was crossing the lobby, at the far end of the long gallery — what should I hear, but a horse snorting, and some people a-talking, short and quiet like. So I looks out o' the window; and there surely I did see two horses yoked to a shay, and a fellah a pullin' a box up o' top; and out comes a valise and a bag; and I think it was old Wyat, please 'm, that Miss Milly calls L'Amour, that stood in the doorway a-talking to the driver."

"And who got into the chaise, Mary?" I asked.

"Well, Miss, I waited as long as I could; but the pain was bad, and me so awful cold; I gave it up at last, and came back to bed, for I could not say how much longer they might wait. And you'll find, Miss, 'twill be kep' a secret, like the shay as you saw'd, Miss, last week. I hate them dark ways, and secrets; and old Wyat — she does tell stories, don't she? — and she as ought to be partickler, seein' her time be short now, and she so old. It is awful, an old un like that telling such crams as she do."

Milly was as curious as I, but could throw no light on this. We both agreed, however, that the departure was probably that of the person whose arrival I had accidentally witnessed. This time the chaise had drawn up at the side door, round the corner of the left side of the house; and, no doubt, driven away by the back road.

Another accident had revealed this nocturnal move. It was very provoking, however, that Mary Quince



had not had resolution to wait for the appearance of the traveller. We all agreed, however, that we were to observe a strict silence, and that even to Wyat — L'Amour I had better continue to call her — Mary Quince was not to hint what she had seen. I suspect, however, that injured curiosity asserted itself, and that Mary hardly adhered to this self-denying resolve.

But cheerful wintry suns and frosty skies, long nights, and brilliant starlight, with good homely fires in our snuggeries — gossipings, stories, short readings now and then, and brisk walks through the always beautiful scenery of Bartram-Haugh, and, above all, the unbroken tenor of our life, which had fallen into a serene routine, foreign to the idea of danger or misadventure, gradually quieted the qualms and misgivings which my interview with Doctor Bryerly had so powerfully resuscitated.

My Cousin Monica, to my inexpressible joy, had returned to her country house; and an active diplomacy, through the post-office, was negotiating the re-opening of friendly relations between the courts of Elverston and of Bartram.

At length, one fine day, Cousin Monica, smiling pleasantly, with her cloak and bonnet on, and her colour fresh from the shrewd air of the Derbyshire hills, stood suddenly before me in our sitting-room. Our meeting was that of two school-companions, long separated. Cousin Monica was always a girl in my eyes.

What a hug it was; what a shower of kisses and ejaculations, inquiries and caresses! At last I pressed her down into a chair, and, laughing, she said —

“You have no idea what self-denial I have exercised



to bring this visit about. I, who detest writing, have actually written five letters to Silas; and I don't think I said a single impertinent thing in one of them! What a wonderful little old thing your butler is! I did not know what to make of him on the steps. Is he a struldbrug, or a fairy, or only a ghost? Where on earth did your uncle pick him up? I'm sure he came in on All Hallows E'en, to answer an incantation — not your future husband, I hope — and he'll vanish some night into gray smoke, and whisk sadly up the chimney. He's the most venerable little thing I ever beheld in my life. I leaned back in the carriage and thought I should absolutely die of laughing. He's gone up to prepare your uncle for my visit; and I really am very glad, for I'm sure I shall look as young as Hebe after *him*. But who is this? Who are you, my dear?"

This was addressed to poor Milly, who stood at the corner of the chimney-piece, staring with her round eyes and plump cheeks in fear and wonder upon the strange lady.

"How stupid of me," I exclaimed. "Milly, dear, this is your cousin, Lady Knollys."

"And so *you* are Millicent. Well, dear, I am very glad to see you." And Cousin Monica was on her feet again in an instant, with Milly's hand very cordially in hers; and she gave her a kiss upon each cheek, and patted her head.

Milly, I must mention, was a much more presentable figure than when I had first encountered her. Her dresses were at least a quarter of a yard longer. Though very rustic, therefore, she was not so barbarously grotesque, by any means.



## CHAPTER IV.

Cousin Monica and Uncle Silas Meet.

COUSIN MONICA, with her hands upon Milly's shoulders, looked amusedly and kindly in her face. "And," said she, "we must be very good friends — you funny creature, you and I. I'm allowed to be the most saucy old woman in Derbyshire — quite incorrigibly privileged; and nobody is ever affronted with me, so I say the most shocking things constantly."

"I'm a bit that way, myself; and I think," said poor Milly, making an effort, and growing very red; she quite lost her head at that point, and was incompetent to finish the sentiment she had prefaced.

"You think? Now, take my advice, and never wait to think, my dear; talk first, and think afterwards, that is my way; though, indeed, I can't say I ever think at all. It is a very cowardly habit. Our cold-blooded Cousin Maud, there, thinks sometimes; but it is always such a failure that I forgive her. I wonder when your little pre-Adamite butler will return. He speaks the language of the Picts and Ancient Britons, I dare say, and your father requires a little time to translate him. And, Milly dear, I am very hungry, so I won't wait for your butler, who would give me, I suppose, one of the cakes baked by King Alfred, and some Danish beer in a skull; but I'll ask you for a little of that nice bread and butter."

With which accordingly Lady Knollys was quickly supplied, but it did not at all impede her utterance.



"Do you think, girls, you could be ready to come away with me, if Silas gives leave, in an hour or two? I should so like to take you both home with me to Elverston."

"How delightful! you darling," cried I, embracing and kissing her; "for my part, I should be ready in five minutes; what do you say, Milly?"

Poor Milly's wardrobe, I am afraid, was more portable than handsome; and she looked horribly affrighted, and whispered in my ear —

"My best petticoat is away at the laundress; say in a week, Maud."

"What does she say?" asked Lady Knollys.

"She fears she can't be ready," I answered, dejectedly.

"There's a deal of my slops in the wash," blurted out poor Milly, staring straight at Lady Knollys.

"In the name of wonder, what does my cousin mean?" asked Lady Knollys.

"Her things have not come home yet from the laundress," I replied; and at this moment our wondrous old butler entered to announce to Lady Knollys that his master was ready to receive her, whenever she was disposed to favour him; and also to make polite apologies for his being compelled, by his state of health, to give her the trouble of ascending to his room.

So cousin Monica was at the door in a moment, over her shoulder calling to us, "Come, girls."

"Please, not yet, my lady — you alone; and he requests the young ladies will be in the way, as he will send for them presently."

I began to admire poor "Giblets" as the wreck of a tolerably respectable servant.



"Very good; perhaps it is better we should kiss and be friends in private first," said Cousin Knollys, laughing; and away she went under the guidance of the mummy.

I had an account of this *tête-à-tête* afterwards from Lady Knollys.

"When I saw him, my dear," she said, "I could hardly believe my eyes — such white hair — such a white face — such mad eyes — such a death-like smile. When I saw him last, his hair was dark; he dressed himself like a modern Englishman; and he really preserved a likeness to the full-length portrait at Knowl, that you fell in love with, you know; but, angels and ministers of grace! such a spectre! I asked myself is it necromancy, or is it delirium tremens that has reduced him to this? And said he, with that odious smile, that made me fancy myself half insane —

"You see a change, Monica."

"What a sweet, gentle, insufferable voice he has! Somebody once told me about the tone of a glass flute that made some people hysterical to listen to, and I was thinking of it all the time. There was always a peculiar quality in his voice."

"I do see a change, Silas," I said at last; "and, no doubt, so do you in me — a great change."

"There has been time enough to work a greater than I observe in you since you last honoured me with a visit," said he.

"I think he was at his old sarcasms, and meant that I was the same impertinent minx he remembered long ago, uncorrected by time; and so I am, and he must not expect compliments from old Monica Knollys.



“‘It is a long time, Silas; but that, you know, is not my fault,’ said I.

“‘Not your fault, my dear — your instinct. We are all imitative creatures: the great people ostracised me, and the small ones followed. We are very like turkeys, we have so much good sense and so much generosity. Fortune, in a freak, wounded my head, and the whole brood were upon me, pecking and gobbling, gobbling and pecking, and you among them, dear Monica. It wasn’t your fault, only your instinct, so I quite forgive you; but no wonder the peckers wear better than the pecked. You are robust; and I, what I am.’

“‘Now, Silas, I have not come here to quarrel. If we quarrel now, mind, we can never make it up — we are too old, so let us forget all we can, and try to forgive something; and if we can do neither, at all events let there be truce between us while I am here.’

“‘My personal wrongs I can quite forgive, and I do, Heaven knows, from my heart; but there are things which ought not to be forgiven. My children have been ruined by it. I may, by the mercy of Providence, be yet set right in the world, and so soon as that time comes, I will remember, and I will act; but my children — you will see that wretched girl, my daughter — education, society, all would come too late — my children have been ruined by it.’

“‘I have not done it; but I know what you mean,’ I said. ‘You menace litigation whenever you have the means; but you forget that Austin placed you under promise, when he gave you the use of this house and place, never to disturb my title to Elverston. So there is my answer, if you mean that.’



“‘I mean what I mean,’ he replied, with his old smile.

“‘You mean then,’ said I, ‘that for the pleasure of vexing me with litigation, you are willing to forfeit your tenure of this house and place.’

“‘Suppose I *did* mean precisely that, why should I forfeit anything? My beloved brother, by his will, has given me a right to the use of Bartram-Haugh for my life, and attached no absurd condition of the kind you fancy to his gift.’

“Silas was in one of his vicious old moods, and liked to menace me. His vindictiveness got the better of his craft; but he knows as well as I do that he never could succeed in disturbing the title of my poor dear Harry Knollys; and I was not at all alarmed by his threats; and I told him so, as coolly as I speak to you now.

“‘Well, Monica,’ he said, ‘I have weighed you in the balance, and you are not found wanting. For a moment the old man possessed me: the thought of my children, of past unkindness, and present affliction and disgrace, exasperated me, and I was mad. It was but for a moment — the galvanic spasm of a corpse. Never was breast more dead than mine to the passions and ambitions of the world. They are not for white locks like these, nor for a man who, for a week in every month, lies in the gate of death. Will you shake hands? *Here* — I *do* strike a truce; and I *do* forget and forgive *everything*.’

“I don’t know what he meant by this scene. I have no idea whether he was acting, or lost his head, or, in fact, why or how it occurred; but I am glad, darling,



that, unlike myself, I was calm, and that a quarrel has not been forced upon me."

When our turn came and we were summoned to the presence, Uncle Silas was quite as usual; but Cousin Monica's heightened colour, and the flash of her eyes, showed plainly that something exciting and angry had occurred.

Uncle Silas commented in his own vein upon the effect of Bartram air and liberty, all he had to offer; and called on me to say how I liked them. And then he called Milly to him, kissed her tenderly, smiled sadly upon her, and turning to Cousin Monica, said —

"This is my daughter, Milly — oh! she has been presented to you down stairs, has she? You have, no doubt, been interested by her. As I told her Cousin Maud, though I am not yet quite a Sir Tunbelly Clumsy, she is a very finished Miss Hoyden. Are not you, my poor Milly? You owe your distinction, my dear, to that line of circumvallation which has, ever since your birth, intercepted all civilization on its way to Bartram. You are much obliged, Milly, to everybody who, whether naturally or *un*-naturally, turned a sod in that invisible but impenetrable work. For your accomplishments — rather singular than fashionable — you are indebted, in part, to your cousin, Lady Knollys. Is not she, Monica? *Thank* her, Milly."

"This is your *truce*, Silas," said Lady Knollys, with a quiet sharpness. "I think, Silas Ruthyn, you want to provoke me to speak in a way before these young creatures which we should all regret."

"So my badinage excites your temper, Monnie. Think how you would feel, then, if I had found you by the highway side, mangled by robbers, and set my



foot upon your throat, and spat in your face. But — stop this. Why have I said this? simply to emphasize my forgiveness. See, girls, Lady Knollys and I, cousins long estranged, forget and forgive the past, and join hands over its buried injuries.”

“Well, *be* it so; only let us have done with ironies and covert taunts.”

And with these words their hands were joined; and Uncle Silas, after he had released hers, patted and fondled it with his, laughing icily and very low all the time.

“I wish so much, dear Monica,” he said, when this piece of silent byplay was over, “that I could ask you to stay to-night; but absolutely I have not a bed to offer, and even if I had, I fear my suit would hardly prevail.”

Then came Lady Knollys’ invitation for Milly and me. He was very much obliged; he smiled over it a great deal, meditating. I thought he was puzzled; and amid his smiles, his wild eyes scanned Cousin Monica’s frank face once or twice suspiciously.

There was a difficulty — an *undefined* difficulty — about letting us go that day; but on a future one — soon — *very* soon — he would be most happy.

Well, there was an end of that little project, for to-day at least; and Cousin Monica was too well-bred to urge it beyond a certain point.

“Milly, my dear, will you put on your hat and show me the grounds about the house? May she, Silas? I should like to renew my acquaintance.”

“You’ll see them sadly neglected, Monnie. A poor man’s pleasure grounds must rely on Nature, and trust to her for effects. Where there is fine timber, however,



and abundance of slope, and rock, and hollow, we sometimes gain in picturesqueness what we lose by neglect in luxury."

Then, as Cousin Monica said she would cross the grounds by a path, and meet her carriage at a point to which we would accompany her, and so make her way home, she took leave of Uncle Silas; a ceremony whereat — without, I thought, much zeal at either side — a kiss took place.

"Now, girls!" said Cousin Knollys, when we were fairly in motion over the grass, "what do you say — will he let you come — yes or no? I can't say, but I think, dear," — this to Milly — "he ought to let you see a little more of the world than appears among the glens and bushes of Bartram. Very pretty they are, like yourself; but very wild, and very little seen. Where is your brother, Milly; is not he older than you?"

"I don't know where; and he is older by six years and a bit."

By-and-by, when Milly was gesticulating to frighten some herons by the river's brink into the air, Cousin Monica said confidentially to me —

"He has run away, I'm told — I wish I could believe it — and enlisted in a regiment going to India, perhaps the best thing for him. Did you see him here before his judicious self-banishment?"

"No."

"Well, I suppose you have had no loss. Doctor Bryerly says from all he can learn he is a very bad young man. And now tell me, dear, is Silas kind to you?"



"Yes, always gentle, just as you saw him to-day; but we don't see a great deal of him — very little, in fact."

"And how do you like your life and the people?" she asked.

"My life, very well; and the people, *pretty* well. There's an old woman we don't like, old Wyat, she is cross and mysterious, and tells untruths; and I don't think she is dishonest — so Mary Quince says — and that, you know, is a point; and there is a family, father and daughter, called Hawkes, who live in the Windmill Wood, who are perfect savages, though my uncle says they don't mean it; but they are very disagreeable, rude people; and except them we see very little of the servants or other people. But there has been a mysterious visit, some one came late at night, and remained for some days, though Milly and I never saw them, and Mary Quince saw a chaise at the side-door at two o'clock at night."

Cousin Monica was so highly interested at this that she arrested her walk and stood facing me, with her hand on my arm, questioning and listening, and lost, as it seemed, in dismal conjecture.

"It is not pleasant, you know," I said.

"No, it is not pleasant," said Lady Knollys, very gloomily.

And just then Milly joined us, shouting to us to look at the herons flying; so Cousin Monica did, and smiled and nodded in thanks to Milly, and was again silent and thoughtful as we walked on.

"You are to come to me, mind, both of you, girls," she said, abruptly; "you *shall*. I'll manage it."

When silence returned, and Milly ran away once



more to try whether the old gray trout was visible in the still water under the bridge, and Cousin Monica said to me in a low tone, looking hard at me —

“You’ve not seen anything to frighten you, Maud? Don’t look so alarmed, dear,” she added with a little laugh, which was not very merry however. “I don’t mean frighten in any awful sense — in fact, I did not mean frighten at all. I meant — I can’t exactly express it — anything to vex, or make you uncomfortable, have you?”

“No, I can’t say I have, except that room in which Mr. Charke was found dead.”

“Oh! you saw that, did you? — I should like to see it so much. Your bedroom is not near it?”

“Oh, no; on the floor beneath, and looking to the front. And Doctor Bryerly talked a little to me, and there seemed to be something on his mind more than he chose to tell me; so that for some time after I saw him I really was, as you say, frightened; but, except that, I really have had no cause. And what was in your mind when you asked me?”

“Well, you know, Maud, you are afraid of ghosts, banditti, and *everything*; and I wished to know whether you were uncomfortable, and what your particular bogle was just now — that, I assure you, was all; and I know,” she continued, suddenly changing her light tone and manner, for one of pointed entreaty, “what Doctor Bryerly said; and I *implore* of you, Maud, to think of it seriously; and when you come to me, you shall do so with the intention of remaining at Elverston.”

“Now, Cousin Monica, is this fair? you and Doctor Bryerly both talk in the same awful way to me: and,



I assure you, you don't know how nervous I am sometimes, and yet you won't, either of you, say what you mean. Now, Monica, dear cousin, won't you tell me?"

"You see, dear, it is so lonely; it's a strange place, and he so odd. I don't like the place, and I don't like him. I've tried, but I can't, and I think I never shall. He may be a very — what was it that good little silly curate at Knowl used to call him — a very advanced Christian — that is it, and I hope he is; but if he is only what he used to be, his utter seclusion from society removes the only check, except personal fear — and he never had much of that — upon a very bad man. And you must know, my dear Maud, what a prize you are, and what an immense trust it is."

Suddenly Cousin Monica stopped short, and looked at me as if she had gone too far.

"But you know, Silas may be very good *now*, although he was wild and selfish in his young days. Indeed I don't know what to make of him; but I am sure when you have thought it over, you will agree with me and Doctor Bryerly, that you must not stay here."

It was vain trying to induce my cousin to be more explicit.

"I hope to see you at Elverston in a very few days. I will *shame* Silas into letting you come. I don't like his reluctance."

"But don't you think he must know that Milly would require some little outfit before her visit."

"Well, I can't say. I hope that is all; but be it



what it may, I'll *make* him let you come, and *immediately* too."

After she had gone, I experienced a repetition of those undefined doubts, which had tortured me for some time after my conversation with Doctor Bryerly. I had truly said, however, I was well enough contented with my mode of life here, for I had been trained at Knowl to a solitude very nearly as profound.



## CHAPTER V.

In which I make another Cousin's Acquaintance.

My correspondence about this time was not very extensive. About once a fortnight a letter from honest Mrs. Rusk conveyed to me how the dogs and ponies were, in queer English, oddly spelt; some village gossip, a critique upon Doctor Clay's or the Curate's last sermon, and some severities generally upon the dissenters' doings, with loves to Mary Quince, and all good wishes to me. Sometimes a welcome letter from cheerful Cousin Monica; and now, to vary the series, a copy of complimentary verses, without a signature, very adoring — very like Byron, I then fancied, and now, I must confess, rather vapid. Could I doubt from whom they came?

I had received, about a month after my arrival, a copy of verses in the same hand, in a plaintive ballad style, of the soldierly sort, in which the writer said, that as living his sole object was to please me, so dying I should be his latest thought; and some more poetic impieties, asking only in return, that when the storm of battle had swept over, I should "shed a tear" on seeing "*the oak lie, where it fell.*" Of course, about this lugubrious pun, there could be no misconception. The Captain was, unmistakably, indicated; and I was so moved that I could no longer retain my secret; but walking with Milly that day, confided the little romance to that unsophisticated listener, under the chestnut trees.



The lines were so amorously dejected, and yet so heroically redolent of blood and gunpowder, that Milly and I agreed that the writer must be on the verge of a sanguinary campaign.

It was not easy to get at Uncle Silas's "Times" or "Morning Post," which we fancied would explain these horrible allusions; but Milly bethought her of a sergeant in the militia, resident in Feltram, who knew the destination and quarters of every regiment in the service; and circuitously, from this authority, we learned, to my infinite relief, that Captain Oakley's regiment had still two years to sojourn in England.

I was summoned one evening by old L'Amour to my uncle's room. I remember his appearance that evening so well, as he lay back in his chair: the pillow; the white glare of his strange eye; his feeble, painful smile.

"You'll excuse my not rising, dear Maud, I am so miserably ill this evening."

I expressed my respectful condolence.

"Yes; I *am* to be pitied; but pity is of no use, dear," he murmured, peevishly. "I sent for you to make you acquainted with your cousin, my son. Where are you, Dudley?"

A figure seated in a low lounging chair, at the other side of the fire, and which till then I had not observed, at these words, rose up a little slowly, like a man stiff after a day's hunting; and I beheld with a shock that held my breath, and fixed my eyes upon him in a stare, the young man whom I had encountered at Church Scarsdale, on the day of my unpleasant excursion there with Madame, and who, to the best of my belief, was also one of that ruffianly party who



had so unspeakably terrified me in the warren at Knowl.

I suppose I looked very much affrighted. If I had been looking at a ghost I could not have felt much more scared and incredulous.

When I was able to turn my eyes upon my uncle he was not looking at me, but with a glimmer of that smile with which a father looks on a son whose youth and comeliness he admires, his white face was turned towards the young man, in whom I beheld nothing but the image of odious and dreadful associations.

"Come, sir," said my uncle, "we must not be too modest. Here's your Cousin Maud — what do you say?"

"How are ye, Miss?" he said, with a sheepish grin.

"Miss! Come, come. Miss us no Misses," said my uncle; "she is Maud, and you Dudley, or I mistake; or we shall have you calling Milly, madame. She'll not refuse you her hand, I venture to think. Come, young gentleman, speak for yourself."

"How are ye, Maud?" he said, doing his best, and drawing near, he extended his hand. "You're welcome to Bartram-Haugh, Miss."

"Kiss your cousin, sir. Where's your gallantry? On my honour, I disown you," exclaimed my uncle, with more energy than he had shown before.

With a clumsy effort, and a grin that was both sheepish and impudent, he grasped my hand and advanced his face. The imminent salute gave me strength to spring back a step or two, and he hesitated.

My uncle laughed peevishly.

"Well, well, that will do, I suppose. In my time



first-cousins did not meet like strangers; but perhaps we were wrong; we are learning modesty from the Americans, and old English ways are too gross for us."

"I have — I've seen him before — that is;" and at this point I stopped.

My uncle turned his strange glare, in a sort of scowl of inquiry, upon me.

"Oh! — hey! why this is news. You never told me. Where have you met, eh, Dudley?"

"Never saw her in my days, so far as I'm aware on," said the young man.

"No! Well, then, Maud, will *you* enlighten us?" said Uncle Silas, coldly.

"I *did* see that young gentleman before," I faltered.

"Meaning *me*, ma'am?" he asked, coolly.

"Yes — certainly *you*. I *did*, Uncle," answered I.

"And where was it, my dear? Not at Knowl, I fancy. Poor dear Austin did not trouble me or mine much with his hospitalities."

This was not a pleasant tone to take in speaking of his dead brother and benefactor; but at the moment I was too much engaged upon the one point to observe it.

"I met" — I could not say my cousin — "I met him, Uncle — your son — that young gentleman — I *saw* him, I should say, at Church Scarsdale, and afterwards with some other persons in the warren at Knowl. It was the night our gamekeeper was beaten."

"Well, Dudley, what do you say to that?" asked Uncle Silas.

"I never *was* at them places, so help me. I don't know where they be; and I never set eyes on the



young lady before, as I hope to be saved, in all my days," said he, with a countenance so unchanged and an air so confident that I began to think I must be the dupe of one of those strange resemblances which have been known to lead to positive identification in the witness-box, afterwards proved to be utterly mistaken.

"You look so — so *uncomfortable*, Maud, at the idea of having seen him before, that I hardly wonder at the vehemence of his denial. There was plainly something disagreeable; but you see as respects him it is a total mistake. My boy was always a truth-telling fellow — you may rely implicitly on what he says. You were *not* at those places?"

"I wish I may ——" began the ingenuous youth, with increased vehemence.

"There, there — that will do; your honour and word as a gentleman — and *that* you are, though a poor one — will quite satisfy your Cousin Maud. Am I right, my dear? I do assure you, as a gentleman, I never knew him to say the thing that was not."

So Mr. Dudley Ruthyn began, not to curse, but to swear, in the prescribed form, that he had never seen me before, or the places I had named, "since I was weaned, by ——"

"That's enough — now, shake hands, if you won't kiss, like cousins," interrupted my uncle.

And very uncomfortably I did lend him my hand to shake.

"You'll want some supper, Dudley, so Maud and I will excuse your going. Good night, my dear boy," and he smiled and waved him from the room.

"That's as fine a young fellow, I think, as any English father can boast for his son — true, brave, and



kind, and quite an Apollo. Did you observe how finely proportioned he is, and what exquisite features the fellow has? He's rustic and rough, as you see; but a year or two in the militia — I've a promise of a commission for him — he's too old for the line — will form and polish him. He wants nothing but manner; and I protest when he has had a little drilling of that kind, I do believe he'll be as pretty a fellow as you'd find in England."

I listened with amazement. I could discover nothing but what was disagreeable in the horrid bumpkin, and thought such an instance of the blindness of parental partiality was hardly credible.

I looked down, dreading another direct appeal to my judgment; and Uncle Silas, I suppose, referred those downcast looks to maiden modesty, for he forbore to task mine by any new interrogatory.

Dudley Ruthyn's cool and resolute denial of ever having seen me or the places I had named, and the inflexible serenity of his countenance while doing so, did very much shake my confidence in my own identification of him. I could not be *quite* certain that the person I had seen at Church Scarsdale was the very same whom I afterwards saw at Knowl. And now, in this particular instance, after the lapse of a still longer period, could I be perfectly certain that my memory, deceived by some accidental points of resemblance, had not duped me, and wronged my cousin, Dudley Ruthyn?

I suppose my uncle had expected from me some signs of acquiescence in his splendid estimate of his cub, and was nettled at my silence. After a short interval he said —



"I've seen something of the world in my day, and I can say, without a misgiving of partiality, that Dudley is the material of a perfect English gentleman. I'm not blind — of course the training must be supplied; a year or two of good models, active self-criticism, and good society. I simply say that the *material* is there."

Here was another interval of silence.

"And now tell me, child, what these recollections of Church — Church — *what?*"

"Church Scarsdale," I replied.

"Yes, thank you — Church Scarsdale and Knowl — are?"

So I related my stories as well as I could.

"Well, dear Maud, the adventure of Church Scarsdale is hardly so terrific as I expected," said Uncle Silas, with a cold little laugh; "and I don't see, if he had really been the hero of it, why he should shrink from avowing it. I know I should not. And I really can't say that your pic-nic party in the grounds of Knowl has frightened me much more. A lady waiting in the carriage, and two or three tipsy young men. Her presence seems to me a guarantee that no mischief was meant; but champagne is the soul of frolic, and a row with the gamekeepers a natural consequence. It happened to me once — forty years ago, when I was a wild young buck — one of the worst rows I ever was in."

And Uncle Silas poured some eau-de-cologne over the corner of his handkerchief, and touched his temples with it.

"If my boy had been there, I do assure you — and I know him — he would say so at once. I fancy he would rather *boast* of it. I never knew him utter an untruth. When you know him a little you'll say so."

With these words Uncle Silas leaned back ex-



hausted, and languidly poured some of his favourite eau-de-cologne over the palms of his hands, nodded a farewell, and, in a whisper, wished me good-night.

"Dudley's come," whispered Milly, taking me under the arm as I entered the lobby. "But I don't care: he never gives me nout; and he gets money from Governor, as much as he likes, and I never a sixpence. It's a shame!"

So there was no great love between the only son and only daughter of the younger line of the Ruthyns.

I was curious to learn all that Milly could tell me of this new inmate of Bartram-Haugh; and Milly was communicative without having a great deal to relate, and what I heard from her tended to confirm my own disagreeable impressions about him. She was afraid of him. He was "a woundy ugly customer in a wax, she could tell me." He was the only one "she ever knowed as had pluck to jaw the Governor." But he was "afear'd on the Governor, too."

His visits to Bartram-Haugh, I heard, were desultory; and this, to my relief, would probably not outlast a week or a fortnight. "He *was* such a fashionable cove;" he was always "a gadding about, mostly to Liverpool or Birmingham, and sometimes to Lunnun, itself." He was "keeping company one time with Beauty, Governor thought, and he was awfully afraid he'd a married her; but that was all bosh and nonsense; and Beauty would have none of his chaff and wheedling, for she liked Tom Brice;" and Milly thought that Dudley never "cared a crack of a whip for her." He used to go to the Windmill to have "a smoke with Pegtop;" and he was a member of the Feltram Club, that met at the "Plume o' Feathers." He was "a rare good



shot," she heard: and "he was before the justices for poaching, but they could make nothing of it." And the Governor said "it was all through spite of him — for they hate us for being better blood than they." And "all but the squires and those upstart folk loves Dudley, he is so handsome and gay — though he be a bit cross at home." And, "Governor says, he'll be a Parliament man yet, spite o' them all."

Next morning, when our breakfast was nearly ended, Dudley tapped at the window with the end of his clay pipe — a "churchwarden" Milly called it — just such a long curved pipe as Joe Willet is made to hold between his lips in those charming illustrations of "Barnaby Rudge" — which we all know so well — and lifting his "wide-awake" with a burlesque salutation, which, I suppose, would have charmed the "Plume of Feathers," he dropped, kicked and caught his "wide-awake," with an agility and a gravity as he replaced it, so inexpressibly humorous, that Milly went off in a loud fit of laughter, with the ejaculation —

"Did you ever!"

It was odd how repulsively my confidence in my original identification always revived on unexpectedly seeing Dudley after an interval.

I could perceive that this piece of comic by-play was meant to make a suitable impression upon me. I received it, however, with a killing gravity; and after a word or two to Milly, he lounged away, having first broken his pipe, bit by bit, into pieces, which he balanced in turn on his nose and on his chin, from which features he jerked them into his mouth, with a precision which, along with his excellent pantomime of eating them, highly excited Milly's mirth and admiration.



## CHAPTER VI.

## My Cousin Dudley.

GREATLY to my satisfaction this engaging person did not appear again that day. But next day Milly told me that my uncle had taken him to task for the neglect with which he was treating us.

"He did pitch into him, sharp and short, and not a word from him, only sulky like; and I so frightened, I durst not look up almost; and they said a lot I could not make head or tail of; and Governor ordered me out o' the room, and glad I was to go; and so they had it out between them."

Milly could throw no light whatsoever upon the adventures at Church Scarsdale and Knowl; and I was left still in doubt, which sometimes oscillated one way and sometimes another. But, on the whole, I could not shake off the misgivings which constantly recurred and pointed very obstinately to Dudley as the hero of those odious scenes.

Oddly enough, though, I now felt far less confident upon the point than I did at first sight. I had begun to distrust my memory, and to suspect my fancy; but of this there could be no question, that between the person so unpleasantly linked in my remembrance with those scenes, and Dudley Ruthyn, a striking, though possibly only a general resemblance did exist.

Milly was certainly right as to the gist of Uncle Silas's injunctions, for we saw more of Dudley henceforward.



He was shy; he was impudent; he was awkward; he was conceited; — altogether a most intolerable bumpkin. Though he sometimes flushed and stammered, and never for a moment was at his ease in my presence, yet, to my inexpressible disgust, there was a self-complacency in his manner, and a kind of triumph in his leer, which very plainly told me how satisfied he was as to the nature of the impression he was making upon me.

I would have given worlds to tell him how odious I thought him. Probably, however, he would not have believed me. Perhaps he fancied that “ladies” affected airs of indifference and repulsion to cover their real feelings. I never looked at or spoke to him when I could avoid either, and then it was as briefly as I could. To do him justice, however, he seemed to have no liking for our society, and certainly never seemed altogether comfortable in it.

I find it hard to write quite impartially even of Dudley Ruthyn's personal appearance; but, with an effort, I confess that his features were good, and his figure not amiss, though a little fattish. He had light whiskers, light hair, and a pink complexion, and very good blue eyes. So far my uncle was right; and if he had been perfectly gentlemanlike he really might have passed for a handsome man in the judgment of some critics.

But there was that odious mixture of *mauvaise honte* and impudence, a clumsiness, a slyness, and a consciousness in his bearing and countenance, not distinctly boorish, but *low*, which turned his good looks into an ugliness more intolerable than that of feature; and a corresponding vulgarity pervading his dress, his



demeanour, and his very walk, marred whatever good points his figure possessed. If you take all this into account, with the ominous and startling misgivings constantly recurring, you will understand the mixed feelings of anger and disgust with which I received the admiration he favoured me with.

Gradually he grew less constrained in my presence, and certainly his manners were not improved by his growing ease and confidence.

He came in while Milly and I were at luncheon, jumped up, with a "right-about face" performed in the air, sitting on the sideboard, whence grinning slyly and kicking his heels, he leered at us.

"Will you have something, Dudley?" asked Milly.

"No, lass; but I'll look at ye, and maybe drink a drop for company."

And with these words, he took a sportsman's flask from his pocket; and helping himself to a large glass and a decanter, he compounded a glass of strong brandy and water, as he talked, and refreshed himself with it from time to time.

"Curate's up wi' the Governor," he said, with a grin. "I wanted a word wi' him; but I s'pose I'll hardly git in this hour or more; they're a praying and disputing, and a Bible chopping as usual. Ha, ha! But 'twont hold much longer, old Wyat says, now that Uncle Austin's dead; there's nout to be made o' praying and that work no longer, and it don't pay of itself."

"O fie! For shame, you sinner!" laughed Milly. "He wasn't in a church these five years, he says, and then only to meet a young lady. Now, isn't he a sinner, Maud — isn't he?"



Dudley, grinning, looked with a languishing slyness at me, biting the edge of his wide-awake, which he held over his breast.

Dudley Ruthyn probably thought there was a manly and desperate sort of fascination in the impiety he professed.

"I wonder, Milly," said I, "at your laughing. How *can* you laugh?"

"You'd have me cry, would ye?" answered Milly.

"I certainly would not have you laugh," I replied.

"I know I wish *some* one 'ud cry for me, and I know who," said Dudley, in what he meant for a very engaging way, and he looked at me as if he thought I must feel flattered by his caring to have my tears.

Instead of crying, however, I leaned back in my chair, and began quietly to turn over the pages of Walter Scott's poems, which I and Milly were then reading in the evenings.

The tone in which this odious young man spoke of his father, his coarse mention of mine, and his low boasting of his irreligion, disgusted me more than ever with him.

"They parsons be slow coaches — awful slow. I'll have a good bit to wait, I s'pose. I should be three miles away and more by this time — drat it!" He was eyeing the legging of the foot which he held up while he spoke, as if calculating how far away that limb should have carried him by this time. "Why can't folk do their Bible and prayers o' Sundays, and get it off their stomachs? I say, Milly lass, will ye see if Governor be done wi' the Curate? Do. I'm a losing the whole day along o' him."



Milly jumped up, accustomed to obey her brother, and as she passed me, whispered, with a wink —

*“Money.”*

And away she went. Dudley whistled a tune, and swung his foot like a pendulum, as he followed her with his side glance.

“I say, it is a hard case, Miss, a lad o’ spirit should be kept so tight. I havn’t a shilling but what comes through his fingers; an’ drat the tizzy he’ll gi’ me till he knows the reason why.”

“Perhaps,” I said, “my uncle thinks you should earn some for yourself.”

“I’d like to know how a fella’s to earn money now-a-days. You wouldn’t have a gentleman to keep a shop, I fancy. But I’ll ha’ a fistful jis now, and no thanks to he. Them executors, you know, owes me a deal o’ money. Very honest chaps, of course; but they’re cursed slow about paying, I know.”

I made no remark upon this elegant allusion to the executors of my dear father’s will.

“An’ I tell ye, Maud, when I git the tin, I know who I’ll buy a farin’ for. I do, lass.”

The odious creature drawled this with a sidelong leer, which, I suppose, he fancied quite irresistible.

I am one of those unfortunate persons who always blushed when I most wished to look indifferent; and now, to my inexpressible chagrin, with its accustomed perversity, I felt the blush mount to my cheeks, and glow even on my forehead.

I saw that he perceived this most disconcerting indication of a sentiment the very idea of which was so detestable, that, equally enraged with myself and with



him, I did not know how to exhibit my contempt and indignation.

Mistaking the cause of my discomposure, Mr. Dudley Ruthyn laughed softly, with an insufferable suavity.

"And there's some'at, lass, I must have in return. Honour thy father, you know; you would not ha' me disobey the Governor? No, you wouldn't — wouldn't ye?"

I darted at him a look which I hoped would have quelled his impertinence; but I blushed most provokingly — more violently than ever.

"I'd back them eyes again' the county, I would," he exclaimed, with a condescending enthusiasm. "You're awful pretty, you are, Maud. I don't know what came over me t'other night when Governor told me to buss ye; but, dang it, ye shan't deny me now, and I'll have a kiss, lass, in spite o' thy blushes."

He jumped from his elevated seat on the sideboard, and came swaggering toward me, with an odious grin, and his arms extended. I started to my feet, absolutely transported with fury.

"Drat me, if she baint agoing to fight me!" he chuckled humorously.

"Come, Maud, you would not be ill-natured, sure? Arter all, it's only our duty. Governor bid us kiss, didn't he?"

"Don't — *don't*, sir. Stand back, or I'll call the servants."

And as it was I began to scream for Milly.

"There's how it is wi' all they cattle! You never knows your own mind — ye don't," he said, surlily. "You make such a row about a bit o' play. Drop it,



will you? There's no one a harming you — is there? I'm not, for sartain."

And, with an angry chuckle, he turned on his heel, and left the room.

I think I was perfectly right to resist, with all the vehemence of which I was capable, this attempt to assume an intimacy which, notwithstanding my uncle's opinion to the contrary, seemed to me like an outrage.

Milly found me alone — not frightened, but very angry. I had quite made up my mind to complain to my uncle, but the Curate was still with him; and, by the time he had gone, I was cooler. My awe of my uncle had returned. I fancied that he would treat the whole affair as a mere playful piece of gallantry. So, with the comfortable conviction that he had had a lesson, and would think twice before repeating his impertinence, I resolved, with Milly's approbation, to leave matters as they were.

Dudley, greatly to my comfort, was huffed with me, and hardly appeared, and was sulky and silent when he did. I lived then in the pleasant anticipation of his departure, which, Milly thought, would be very soon.

My uncle had his Bible and his consolations; but it cannot have been pleasant to this old *roué*, converted though he was — this refined man of fashion — to see his son grow up an outcast, and a Tony Lumpkin; for whatever he may have thought of his natural gifts, he must have known how mere a boor he was.

I try to recall my then impressions of my uncle's character. Grizzly and chaotic the image rises — silver head — feet of clay. I as yet knew little of him.



I began to perceive that he was what Mary Quince used to call "dreadful particular" — I suppose a little selfish and impatient. He used to get cases of turtle from Liverpool. He drank claret and hock for his health, and ate woodcock and other light and salutary dainties for the same reason; and was petulant and vicious about the cooking of these and the flavour and clearness of his coffee.

His conversation was easy, polished, and, with a sentimental glazing, cold; but across this artificial talk, with its French rhymes, racy phrases, and fluent eloquence, like a streak of angry light, would, at intervals, suddenly gleam some dismal thought of religion. I never could quite satisfy myself whether they were affectations or genuine, like intermittent thrills of pain.

The light of his large eyes was very peculiar. I can liken it to nothing but the sheen of intense moonlight on burnished metal. But that cannot express it. It glared white and suddenly — almost fatuous. I thought of Moore's lines whenever I looked on it: —

"Oh, ye dead! oh, ye dead! whom we know by the light you give  
From your cold gleaming eyes, though you move like men who live."

I never saw in any other eye the least glimmer of the same baleful effulgence. His fits, too — his hoverings between life and death — between intellect and insanity — a dubious, marsh-fire existence, horrible to look on!

I was puzzled even to comprehend his feelings toward his children. Sometimes it seemed to me that he was ready to lay down his soul for them; at others, he looked and spoke almost as if he hated them. He



talked as if the image of death was always before him, yet he took a terrible interest in life, while seemingly dozing away the dregs of his days in sight of his coffin.

Oh! Uncle Silas, tremendous figure in the past, burning always in memory in the same awful lights; the fixed white face of scorn and anguish! It seems as if the Woman of Endor had led me to that chamber and showed me a spectre.

Dudley had not left Bartram-Haugh when a little note reached me from Lady Knollys. It said —

“DEAREST MAUD, — I have written by this post to Silas, beseeching a loan of you and my Cousin Milly. I see no reason your uncle can possibly have for refusing me; and, therefore, I count confidently on seeing you both at Elverston to-morrow, to stay for at least a week. I have hardly a creature to meet you. I have been disappointed in several visitors; but, another time, we shall have a gayer house. Tell Milly — with my love — that I will not forgive her if she fails to accompany you.

“Believe me ever your affectionate cousin,

“MONICA KNOLLYS.”

Milly and I were both afraid that Uncle Silas would refuse his consent, although we could not divine any sound reason for his doing so, and there were many in favour of his improving the opportunity of allowing poor Milly to see some persons of her own sex above the rank of menials.

At about twelve o'clock my uncle sent for us, and, to our great delight, announced his consent, and wished us a very happy excursion.



## CHAPTER VII.

## Elverston and its People.

So Milly and I drove through the gabled high street of Feltram next day. We saw my gracious cousin smoking with a man like a groom, at the door of the "Plume of Feathers." I drew myself back as we passed, and Milly popped her head out of the window.

"I'm blessed," said she, laughing, "if he hadn't his thumb to his nose, and winding up his little finger, the way he does with old Wyat — L'Amour, ye know; and you may be sure he said something funny, for Jim Jolliter was laughin', with his pipe in his hand."

"I wish I had not seen him, Milly. I feel as if it were an ill omen. He always looks so cross; and I dare say he wished us some ill," I said.

"No, no, you don't know Dudley; if he were angry he'd say nothing that's funny; no, he's not vexed, only shamming vexed."

The scenery through which we passed was very pretty. The road brought us through a narrow and wooded glen. Such studies of ivied rocks and twisted roots! A little stream tinkled lonely through the hollow. Poor Milly! In her odd way she made herself companionable. I have sometimes fancied an enjoyment of natural scenery not so much a faculty as an acquirement. It is so exquisite in the instructed, so strangely



absent in uneducated humanity. But certainly with Milly it was inborn and hearty; and so she could enter into my raptures, and requite them.

Then over one of those beautiful Derbyshire moors we drove, and so into a wide wooded hollow, where was our first view of Cousin Monica's pretty gabled house, beautified with that indescribable air of shelter and comfort which belongs to an old English residence, with old timber grouped round it, and something in its aspect of the quaint old times and bygone merry makings, saying sadly, but genially, "Come in: I bid you welcome. For two hundred years, or more, have I been the home of this beloved old family, whose generations I have seen in the cradle and in the coffin, and whose mirth and sorrows and hospitalities I remember. All their friends, like you, were welcome; and you, like them, will here enjoy the warm illusions that cheat the sad conditions of mortality; and like them you will go your way, and others succeed you, till at last I, too, shall yield to the general law of decay, and disappear."

By this time poor Milly had grown very nervous, a state which she described in such very odd phraseology as threw me, in spite of myself — for I affected an impressive gravity in lecturing her upon her language — into a hearty fit of laughter.

I must mention, however, that in certain important points Milly was very essentially reformed. Her dress, though not very fashionable, was no longer absurd. And I had drilled her into speaking and laughing quietly; and for the rest I trusted to the indulgence which is always, I think, more honestly and easily obtained from well-bred than from under-bred people.



Cousin Monica was out when we arrived; but we found that she had arranged a double-bedded room for me and Milly, greatly to our content; and good Mary Quince was placed in the dressing-room beside us.

We had only just commenced our toilet when our hostess entered, as usual in high spirits, welcomed and kissed us both again and again. She was, indeed, in extraordinary delight, for she had anticipated some stratagem or evasion to prevent our visit; and in her usual way spoke her mind as frankly about Uncle Silas to poor Milly as she used to do of my dear father to me.

"I did not think he would let you come without a battle; and you know if he chose to be obstinate it would not have been easy to get you out of the enchanted ground, for so it seems to be with that awful old wizard in the midst of it. I mean, Silas, your papa, my dear. Honestly, is not he very like Michael Scott?"

"I never saw him," answered poor Milly. "At least, that I'm aware of," she added, perceiving us smile. "But I do think he's a thought like old Michael Dobbs, that sells the ferrets, maybe you mean him?"

"Why, you told me, Maud, that you and Milly were reading Walter Scott's poems. Well, no matter. Michael Scott, my dear, was a dead wizard, with ever so much silvery hair, lying in his grave for ever so many years, with just life enough to scowl when they took his book; and you'll find him in the 'Lay of the Last Minstrel,' exactly like your papa, my dear. And my people tell me that your brother Dudley has been seen drinking and smoking about Feltram this week. How long does he remain at home? Not very long,



eh? And, Maud, dear, he has not been making love to you? Well, I see; of course he has. And *apropos* of love-making, I hope that impudent creature, Charles Oakley, has not been teasing you with notes or verses."

"Indeed but he has though," interposed Miss Milly; a good deal to my chagrin, for I saw no particular reason for placing his verses in Cousin Monica's hands. So I confessed the two little copies of verses, with the qualification, however, that I did not know from whom they came.

"Well now, dear Maud, have not I told you fifty times over to have nothing to say to him? I've found out, my dear, he plays, and he is very much in debt. I've made a vow to pay no more for him. I've been such a fool, you have no notion; and I'm speaking, you know, against myself; it would be such a relief if he were to find a wife to support him; and he has been, I'm told, very sweet upon a rich old maid — a button-maker's sister, in Manchester."

This arrow was well shot.

"But don't be frightened: you are richer as well as younger; and, no doubt, will have your chance first, my dear; and in the meantime, I dare say, those verses, like Falstaff's *billet-doux*, you know, are doing double duty."

I laughed, but the button-maker was a secret trouble to me; and I would have given I know not what that Captain Oakley were one of the company, that I might treat him with the refined contempt which his deserts and my dignity demanded.

Cousin Monica busied herself about Milly's toilet, and was a very useful lady's maid, chatting in her own



way all the time; and, at last, tapping Milly under the chin with her finger, she said, very complacently —

“I think I have succeeded, Miss Milly; look in the glass. She really is a very pretty creature.”

And Milly blushed, and looked with a shy gratification, which made her still prettier, on the mirror.

Milly indeed was very pretty. She looked much taller now that her dresses were made of the usual length. A little plump she was, beautifully fair, with such azure eyes, and rich hair.

“The more you laugh the better, Milly, for you’ve got very pretty teeth — very pretty; and if you were my daughter, or if your father would become president of a college of magicians, and give you up to me, I venture to say I would place you very well; and even as it is we must try, my dear.”

So down to the drawing-room we went; and Cousin Monica entered, leading us both by the hands.

By this time the curtains were closed, and the drawing-room dependent on the pleasant glow of the fire, and the slight provisional illumination usual before dinner.

“Here are my two cousins,” began Lady Knollys: “this is Miss Ruthyn, of Knowl, whom I take the liberty of calling Maud; and this is Miss Millicent Ruthyn, Silas’s daughter, you know, whom I venture to call Milly; and they are very pretty, as you will see, when we get a little more light, and they know it very well themselves.”

And as she spoke, a frank-eyed, gentle, prettyish lady, not so tall as I, but with a very kind face, rose up from a book of prints, and, smiling, took our hands.

She was by no means young, as I then counted



youth — past thirty, I suppose — and with an air that was very quiet, and friendly, and engaging. She had never been a mere fashionable woman plainly; but she had the ease and polish of the best society, and seemed to take a kindly interest both in Milly and me; and Cousin Monica called her Mary, and sometimes Polly. That was all I knew of her for the present.

So very pleasantly the time passed by till the dressing-bell rang, and we ran away to our room.

“Did I say anything very bad?” asked poor Milly, standing exactly before me, so soon as our door was shut.

“Nothing, Milly; you are doing admirably.”

“And I do look a great fool, don’t I?” she demanded.

“You look extremely pretty, Milly; and not a bit like a fool.”

“I watch everything. I think I’ll learn it at last; but it comes a little troublesome at first; and they do talk different from what I used — you were quite right there.”

When we returned to the drawing-room, we found the party already assembled, and chatting evidently with spirit.

The village doctor, whose name I forget, a small man, grey, with shrewd grey eyes, sharp and mulberry nose, whose conflagration extended to his rugged cheeks, and touched his chin and forehead, was conversing, no doubt agreeably, with Mary, as Cousin Monica called her guest.

Over my shoulder Milly whispered —

“Mr. Carysbroke.”



And Milly was quite right: that gentleman chatting with Lady Knollys, his elbow resting on the chimney-piece, was, indeed, our acquaintance of the Windmill Wood. He instantly recognized us, and met us with his pleased and intelligent smile.

"I was just trying to describe to Lady Knollys the charming scenery of the Windmill Wood, among which I was so fortunate as to make your acquaintance, Miss Ruthyn. Even in this beautiful county I know of nothing prettier."

Then he sketched it, as it were, with a few light but glowing words.

"What a sweet scene!" said Cousin Monica: "only think of her never bringing me through it. She reserves it, I fancy, for her romantic adventures; and you, I know, are very benevolent, Ilbury, and all that kind of thing; but I am not quite certain that you would have walked along that narrow parapet, over a river, to visit a sick old woman, if you had not happened to see two very pretty demoiselles on the other side."

"What an ill-natured speech! I must either forfeit my character for disinterested benevolence, so justly admired, or disavow a motive that does such infinite credit to my taste," exclaimed Mr. Carysbroke. "I think a charitable person would have said that a philanthropist, in prosecuting his virtuous, but perilous vocation, was unexpectedly *rewarded* by a vision of angels."

"And with these angels loitered away the time which ought to have been devoted to good Mother Hubbard, in her fit of lumbago, and returned without having set eyes on that afflicted Christian, to amaze his worthy sister with poetic babblings about wood-



nymphs and such pagan impieties," rejoined Lady Knollys.

"Well, be just," he replied, laughing: "did not I go next day and see the patient?"

"Yes; next day you went by the same route — in quest of the dryades, I am afraid, and were rewarded — by the spectacle of Mother Hubbard."

"Will nobody help a humane man in difficulties?" Mr. Carysbroke appealed.

"I do believe," said the lady whom as yet I knew only as Mary, "that every word that Monica says is perfectly true."

"And if it be so, am I not all the more in need of help? truth is simply the most dangerous kind of defamation, and I really think I'm most cruelly persecuted."

At this moment dinner was announced, and a meek and dapper little clergyman, with smooth pink cheeks, and tresses parted down the middle, whom I had not seen before, emerged from shadow.

This little man was assigned to Milly, Mr. Carysbroke to me, and I know not how the remaining ladies divided the doctor between them.

That dinner, the first at Elverston, I remember as a very pleasant repast. Everyone talked — it was impossible that conversation should flag where Lady Knollys was; and Mr. Carysbroke was very agreeable and amusing. At the other side of the table the little pink curate, I was happy to see, was prattling away, with a modest fluency, in an under tone to Milly, who was following my instructions most conscientiously, and speaking in so low a key that I could hardly hear at the opposite side one word she was saying.



That night Cousin Monica paid us a visit, as we sat chatting by the fire in our room; and I told her —

“I have just been telling Milly what an impression she has made. The pretty little clergyman — *il en est épris* — he has evidently quite lost his heart to her. I dare say he’ll preach next Sunday on some of King Solomon’s wise sayings about the irresistible strength of women.”

“Yes,” said Lady Knollys; “or maybe on the sensible text, ‘Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour,’ and so forth. At all events, I may say, Milly, whoso findeth a husband such as he findeth a tolerably good thing. He is an exemplary little creature, second son of Sir Harry Biddlepen, with a little independent income of his own, beside his church revenues of ninety pounds a-year; and I don’t think a more harmless and docile little husband could be found anywhere; and I think, Miss Maud, *you* seemed a good deal interested too.

I laughed and blushed, I suppose; and Cousin Monica, skipping after her went to quite another matter, said in her odd frank way —

“And how has Silas been? — not cross, I hope, or very odd. There was a rumour that your brother, Dudley, had gone a soldiering to India, Milly, or somewhere; but that was all a story, for he has turned up, just as usual. And what does he mean to do with himself? He has got some money now — your poor father’s will, Maud. Surely he doesn’t mean to go on lounging and smoking away his life among poachers, and prizefighters, and worse people. He ought to go to Australia, like Thomas Swain, who, they say, is making a fortune — a great fortune — and coming



home again. That's what your brother Dudley should do, if he has either sense or spirit; but I suppose he won't — too long abandoned to idleness and low company — and he'll not have a shilling left in a year or two. Does he know, I wonder, that his father has served a notice or something on Dr. Bryerly, telling him to pay sixteen hundred pounds of poor Austin's legacy to *him*, and saying that he has paid debts of the young man, and holds his acknowledgments to that amount. He won't have a guinea in a year if he stays here. I'd give fifty pounds he was in Van Diemen's Land — not that I care for the cub, Milly, any more than you do; but I really don't see any honest business he has in England."

Milly gaped in a total puzzle as Lady Knollys rattled on.

"You know, Milly, you must not be talking about this when you go home to Bartram, because Silas would prevent your coming to me any more if he thought I spoke so freely: but I can't help it; so you must promise to be more discreet than I. And I am told that all kinds of claims are about to be pressed against him, now that he is thought to have got some money; and he has been cutting down oak and selling the bark, Doctor Bryerly has been told, in that Windmill Wood; and he has kilns there for burning charcoal, and got a man from Lancashire who understands it. Hawk, or something like that."

"Ay, Hawkes — Dickon Hawkes; that's Pegtop, you know, Maud," said Milly.

"Well, I dare say; but a man of very bad character, Dr. Bryerly says; and he has written to Mr. Danvers about it — for that is what they call waste, cutting



down and selling the timber, and the oak-bark, and burning the willows, and other trees that are turned into charcoal. It is all *waste*, and Dr. Bryerly is about to put a stop to it."

"Has he got your carriage for you, Maud, and your horses?" asked Cousin Monica, suddenly.

"They have not come yet, but in a few weeks, Dudley says, positively"—

Cousin Monica laughed a little and shook her head.

"Yes, Maud, the carriage and horses will always be coming in a few weeks, till the time is over; and meanwhile the old travelling chariot and post horses will do very well," and she laughed a little again.

"That's why the stile's pulled away at the paling, I suppose; and Beauty — Meg Hawkes, that is — is put there to stop us going through; for I often spied the smoke beyond the windmill," observed Milly.

Cousin Monica listened with interest and nodded silently.

I was very much shocked. It seemed to me quite incredible. I think Lady Knollys read my amazement, and my exalted estimate of the heinousness of the procedure in my face, for she said—

"You know we can't quite condemn Silas till we have heard what he has to say. He may have done it in ignorance; or, it is just possible, he may have the right."

"Quite true. He may have the right to cut down trees at Bartram-Haugh. At all events, I am sure he thinks he has," I echoed.

The fact was that I would not avow to myself a suspicion of Uncle Silas. Any falsehood there opened



an abyss beneath my feet into which I dared not look.

"And now, dear girls, good-night. You must be tired. We breakfast at a quarter past nine — not too early for you, I know."

And so saying she kissed us, smiling, and was gone.

I was so unpleasantly occupied, for some time after her departure, with the knaveries said to be practised among the dense cover of the Windmill Wood, that I did not immediately recollect that we had omitted to ask her any particulars about her guests.

"Who can Mary be?" said Milly.

"Cousin Monica says she's engaged to be married, and I think I heard the Doctor call her *Lady Mary*, and I intended asking her ever so much about her; but what she told us about cutting down the trees, and all that, quite put it out of my head. We shall have time enough to-morrow, however, to ask questions. I like her very much, I know."

"And I think," said Milly, "it is to Mr. Carysbroke she's to be married."

"Do you?" said I, remembering that he had sat beside her for more than a quarter of an hour after tea in very close and low-toned conversation; "and have you any particular reason?" I asked.

"Well, I heard her once or twice call him 'dear,' and she called him his Christian name, just like Lady Knollys did — Ilbury, I think — and I saw him gi' her a sly kiss as she was going up stairs."

I laughed.

"Well, Milly," I said, "I remarked something myself, I thought, like confidential relations; but if you



really saw them kiss on the staircase, the question is pretty well settled."

"Ay, lass."

"You're not to say *lass*."

"Well, *Maud*, then. I did see them with the corner of my eye, and my back turned, when they did not think I could spy anything, as plain as I see you now."

I laughed again; but I felt an odd pang — something of mortification — something of regret; but I smiled very gaily, as I stood before the glass, unmaking my toilet preparatory to bed.

"Maud — Maud — fickle Maud! — What, Captain Oakley already superseded! and Mr. Carysbroke — oh! humiliation — engaged." So I smiled on, very much vexed; and being afraid lest I had listened with too apparent an interest to this impostor, I sang a verse of a gay little chanson, and tried to think of Captain Oakley, who somehow had become rather silly.



## CHAPTER VIII.

## News at Bartram Gate.

MILLY and I, thanks to our early Bartram hours, were first down next morning; and so soon as Cousin Monica appeared we attacked her.

"So Lady Mary is the *fiancé* of Mr. Carysbroke," said I, very cleverly; "and I think it was very wicked of you to try and involve me in a flirtation with him yesterday."

"And who told you that, pray?" asked Lady Knollys, with a pleasant little laugh.

"Milly and I discovered it, simple as we stand here," I answered.

"But you did not flirt with Mr. Carysbroke, Maud, did you?" she asked.

"No, certainly not; but that was not your doing, wicked woman, but my discretion. And now that we know your secret, you must tell us all about her, and all about him; and in the first place, what is her name — Lady Mary what?" I demanded.

"Who would have thought you so cunning? Two country misses — two little nuns from the cloisters of Bartram! Well, I suppose I must answer. It is vain trying to hide anything from you; but how on earth did you find it out?"

"We'll tell you that presently, but you shall first tell us who she is," I persisted.

"Well, that I will, of course, without compulsion. She is Lady Mary Carysbroke," said Lady Knollys.



"A relation of Mr. Carysbroke's," I asserted.

"Yes, a relation; but who told you he was Mr. Carysbroke?" asked Cousin Monica.

"Milly told me, when we saw him in the Windmill Wood."

"And who told you, Milly?"

"It was L'Amour," answered Milly, with her blue eyes very wide open.

"What does the child mean? L'Amour! You don't mean *love*?" exclaimed Lady Knollys, puzzled in her turn.

"I mean old Wyat; *she* told me, and the Governor."

"You're *not* to say that," I interposed.

"You mean your father?" suggested Lady Knollys.

"Well, yes; father told her, and so I knew him."

"What could he mean?" exclaimed Lady Knollys, laughing, as it were in soliloquy; "and I did not mention his name. I recollect now. He recognised you, and you him, when you came into the room yesterday; and now you must tell me how you discovered that he and Lady Mary were to be married?"

So Milly restated her evidence, and Lady Knollys laughed unaccountably heartily; and she said—

"They *will* be so confounded! but they deserve it; and, remember, *I* did not say so."

"Oh! we acquit you."

"All I say is, such a deceitful, dangerous pair of girls — all things considered — I never heard of before," exclaimed Lady Knollys. "There's no such thing as conspiring in your presence."

"Good morning. I hope you slept well." She was addressing the lady and gentleman who were just



entering the room from the conservatory. "You'll hardly sleep so well to-night, when you have learned what eyes are upon you. Here are two very pretty detectives who have found out your secret, and entirely by your imprudence and their own cleverness have discovered that you are a pair of betrothed lovers, about to ratify your vows at the hymeneal altar. I assure you I did not tell of you; you betrayed yourselves. If you will talk in that confidential way on sofas, and call one another stealthily by your Christian names, and actually kiss at the foot of the stairs, while a clever detective is scaling them, apparently with her back toward you, you must only take the consequences, and be known prematurely as the hero and heroine of the forthcoming paragraph in the *Morning Post*."

Milly and I were horribly confounded, but Cousin Monica was resolved to place us all upon the least formal terms possible, and I believe she had set about it in the right way.

"And now, girls, I am going to make a counter-discovery, which, I fear, a little conflicts with yours. This Mr. Carysbroke is Lord Ilbury, brother of this Lady Mary; and it is all my fault for not having done my honours better; but you see what clever match-making little creatures they are."

"You can't think how flattered I am at being made the subject of a theory, even a mistaken one, by Miss Ruthyn."

And so, after our modest fit was over, Milly and I were very merry, like the rest, and we all grew a great deal more intimate that morning.

I think altogether those were the pleasantest and happiest days of my life: gay, intelligent, and kindly



society at home; charming excursions — sometimes riding — sometimes by carriage — to distant points of beauty in the county. Evenings varied with music, reading, and spirited conversation. Now and then a visitor for a day or two, and constantly some neighbour from the town, or its dependencies, dropt in. Of these I but remember tall old Miss Wintletop, most entertaining of rustic old maids, with her nice lace and thick satin, and her small, kindly round face — pretty, I dare say, in other days, and now frosty, but kindly — who told us such delightful old stories of the county in her father's and grandfather's time; who knew the lineage of every family in it, and could recount all its duels and elopements; give us illustrative snatches from old election squibs, and lines from epitaphs, and tell exactly where all the old-world highway robberies had been committed: how it fared with the chief delinquents after the assizes; and, above all, where, and of what sort, the goblins and elves of the county had made themselves seen, from the phantom post-boy, who every third night crossed Windale moor, by the old coach-road, to the fat old ghost, in mulberry velvet, who showed his great face, crutch, and ruffles, by moonlight, at the bow window of the old court-house that was taken down in 1803.

You cannot imagine what agreeable evenings we passed in this society, or how rapidly my good Cousin Milly improved in it. I remember well the intense suspense in which she and I awaited the answer from Bartram Haugh to kind Cousin Monica's application for an extension of our leave of absence.

It came, and with it a note from Uncle Silas, which was curious, and, therefore, is printed here —



“MY DEAR LADY KNOLLYS, — To your kind letter I say yes (that is, for another week, not a fortnight), with all my heart. I am glad to hear that my starlings chatter so pleasantly; at all events the refrain is not that of Sterne’s. They can get out; and do get out; and shall get out as much as they please. I am no gaoler, and shut up nobody but myself. I have always thought that young people have too little liberty. My principle has been to make little free men and women of them from the first. In morals, altogether — in intellect, more than we allow — *self*-education is that which abides; and *it* only begins where constraint ends. Such is my theory. My practice is consistent. Let them remain for a week longer, as you say. The horses shall be at Elverston on Tuesday, the 7th. I shall be more than usually sad and solitary till their return; so pray, I selfishly entreat, do not extend their absence. You will smile, remembering how little my health will allow me to see of them, even when at home; but as Chaulieu so prettily says — I stupidly forget the words, but the sentiment is this — ‘although concealed by a sylvan wall of leaves, impenetrable — (he is pursuing his favourite nymphs through the alleys and intricacies of a rustic labyrinth) — yet, your songs, your prattle, and your laughter, faint and far away, inspire my fancy; and, through my ears, I see your unseen smiles, your blushes, your floating tresses, and your ivory feet; and so, though sad, am happy; though alone, in company;’ — and such is my case.

“One only request, and I have done. Pray remind them of a promise made to me. The Book of Life — the fountain of life — it must be drunk of, night and morning, or their spiritual life expires.



"And now, Heaven bless and keep you, my dear cousin; and with all assurances of affection to my beloved niece and my child, believe me ever yours affectionately,

"SILAS RUTHYN."

Said Cousin Monica, with a waggish smile —

"And so, girls, you have Chaulieu and the evangelists; the French rhymester in his alley, and Silas in the valley of the shadow of death; perfect liberty, and a peremptory order to return in a week; — all illustrating one another. Poor Silas! old as he is, I don't think his religion fits him."

*I* really rather liked his letter. I was struggling hard to think well of him, and Cousin Monica knew it; and I really think if I had not been by, she would often have been less severe on him.

As we were all sitting pleasantly about the breakfast table a day or two after, the sun shining on the pleasant wintry landscape, Cousin Monica suddenly exclaimed —

"I quite forgot to tell you that Charles Oakley has written to say he is coming on Wednesday. I really don't want him. Poor Charlie! I wonder how they manage those doctors' certificates. I know nothing ails him, and he'd be much better with his regiment."

Wednesday! — how odd. Exactly the day after my departure. I tried to look perfectly unconcerned. Lady Knollys had addressed herself more to Lady Mary and Milly than to me, and nobody in particular was looking at me. Notwithstanding, with my usual perversity, I felt myself blushing with a brilliancy that may have been very becoming, but which was so



intolerably provoking that I would have risen and left the room but that matters would have been so infinitely worse. I could have boxed my odious ears. I could almost have jumped from the window.

I felt that Lord Ilbury saw it. I saw Lady Mary's eyes for a moment resting gravely on my tell-tale — my lying cheeks — for I really had begun to think much less celestially of Captain Oakley. I was angry with Cousin Monica, who, knowing my blushing infirmity, had mentioned her nephew so suddenly while I was strapped by etiquette in my chair, with my face to the window, and two pair of most disconcerting eyes, at least, opposite. I was angry with myself — generally angry — refused more tea rather dryly, and was laconic to Lord Ilbury, all which, of course, was very cross and foolish; and afterwards, from my bedroom window, I saw Cousin Monica and Lady Mary among the flowers, under the drawing-room window, talking, as I instinctively knew, of that little incident. I was standing at the glass.

"My odious, stupid, *perjured* face," I whispered, furiously, at the same time stamping on the floor, and giving myself quite a smart slap on the cheek. "I *can't* go down — I'm ready to cry — I've a mind to return to Bartram to-day; I am *always* blushing; and I wish that impudent Captain Oakley was at the bottom of the sea."

I was, perhaps, thinking more of Lord Ilbury than I was aware; and I am sure if Captain Oakley had arrived that day I should have treated him with most unjustifiable rudeness.

Notwithstanding this unfortunate blush, the remainder of our visit passed very happily for me. No



one who has not experienced it can have an idea how intimate a small party, such as ours, will grow in a short time in a country house.

Of course, a young lady of a well-regulated mind cannot possibly care a pin about any one of the opposite sex until she is well assured that he is beginning, at least, to like her better than all the world beside; but I could not deny to myself that I was rather anxious to know more about Lord Ilbury than I actually did know.

There was a "Peerage," in its bright scarlet and gold uniform, corpulent and tempting, upon the little marble table in the drawing-room. I had many opportunities of consulting it, but I never could find courage to do so.

For an inexperienced person it would have been a matter of several minutes, and during those minutes what awful risk of surprise and detection. One day, all being quiet, I did venture, and actually, with a beating heart, got so far as to find out the letters "Il," when I heard a step outside the door, which opened a little bit, and I heard Lady Knollys, luckily arrested at the entrance, talk some sentences outside, her hand still upon the door-handle. I shut the book, as Mrs. Bluebeard might the door of the chamber of horrors at sound of her husband's step, and skipped to a remote part of the room, where Cousin Knollys found me, in a mysterious state of agitation.

On any other subject I would have questioned Cousin Monica unhesitatingly; upon this, somehow, I was dumb. I distrusted myself, and dreaded my odious habit of blushing, and knew that I should look so horribly guilty, and become so agitated and odd, that she



would have reasonably concluded that I had quite lost my heart to him.

After the lesson I had received, and my narrow escape of detection in the very act, you may be sure I never trusted myself in the vicinity of that fat and cruel "Peerage," which possessed the secret, but would not disclose without compromising me.

In this state of tantalizing darkness and conjecture I should have departed, had not Cousin Monica quite spontaneously relieved me.

The night before our departure she sat with us in our room, chatting a little farewell gossip.

"And what do you think of Ilbury?" she asked.

"I think him clever and accomplished, and amusing; but he sometimes appears to me very melancholy — that is, for a few minutes together — and then, I fancy, with an effort, re-engages in our conversation."

"Yes, poor Ilbury! He lost his brother only about five months since, and is only beginning to recover his spirits a little. They were very much attached, and people thought that he would have succeeded to the title, had he lived, because Ilbury is *difficile* — or a philosopher — or a *Saint Kevin*; and, in fact, has begun to be treated as a premature old bachelor."

"What a charming person his sister, Lady Mary, is. She has made me promise to write to her," I said, I suppose — such hypocrites are we — to prove to Cousin Knollys that I did not care particularly to hear anything more about him.

"Yes, and so devoted to him. He came down here, and took The Grange, for change of scene, and solitude — of all things the worst for a man in grief — a morbid whim, as he is beginning to find out; for



he is very glad to stay here, and confesses that he is much better since he came. His letters are still addressed to him as Mr. Carysbroke; for he fancied if his rank were known that the county people would have been calling upon him, and so he would have found himself soon involved in a tiresome round of dinners, and must have gone somewhere else. You saw him, Milly, at Bartram, before Maud came?"

Yes, she had, when he called there to see her father.

"He thought, as he had accepted the trustee-ship, that he could hardly, residing so near, omit to visit Silas. He was very much struck and interested by him, and he has a better opinion of him — you are not angry, Milly — than some ill-natured people I could name; and he says that the cutting down of the trees will turn out to have been a mere slip. But these slips don't occur with clever men in other things; and some persons have a way of always making them in their own favour. And, to talk of other things, I suspect that you and Milly will probably see Ilbury at Bartram; for I think he likes you very much."

*You*; did she mean *both*, or only me?

So our pleasant visit was over. Milly's good little curate had been much thrown in her way by our deep and dangerous Cousin Monica. He was most laudably steady; and his flirtation advanced upon the field of theology, where, happily, Milly's little reading had been concentrated. A mild and earnest interest in poor, pretty Milly's orthodoxy was the leading feature of his case; and I was highly amused at her references to me, when we had retired at night, upon the points which she had disputed with him, and her anxious



reports of their low-toned conferences, carried on upon a sequestered ottoman, where he patted and stroked his crossed leg, as he smiled tenderly and shook his head at her questionable doctrine. Milly's reverence for her instructor and his admiration, grew daily; and he was known among us as Milly's confessor.

He took luncheon with us on the day of our departure, and with an adroit privacy, which in a layman would have been sly, presented her, in right of his holy calling, with a little book, the binding of which was mediæval und costly, and whose letter-press dealt in a way which he commended, with some points on which she was not satisfactory; and she found on the fly-leaf this little inscription: — "Presented to Miss Millicent Ruthyn by an earnest well-wisher, 1st December, 1844." A text, very neatly penned, followed this; and the "presentation" was made unctuously indeed, but with a blush, as well as the accustomed smile, and with eyes that were lowered.

The early crimson sun of December had gone down behind the hills before we took our seats in the carriage.

Lord Ilbury leaned with his elbow on the carriage window, looking in, and he said to me —

"I really don't know what we shall do, Miss Ruthyn; we shall all feel so lonely. For myself, I think I shall run away to Grange."

This appeared to me as nearly perfect eloquence as human lips could utter.

His hand still rested on the window, and the Rev. Sprigge Biddlepen was standing with a saddened smirk on the door steps, when the whip smacked, the horses scrambled into motion, and away we rolled down the



avenue, leaving behind us the pleasantest house and hostess in the world, and trotting fleetly into darkness toward Bartram-Haugh.

We were both rather silent. Milly had her book in her lap, and I saw her every now and then try to read her "earnest well-wisher's" little inscription, but there was not light to read by.

When we reached the great gate of Bartram-Haugh it was dark. Old Cowl, who kept the gate, I heard enjoining the postilion to make no avoidable noise at the hall-door, for the odd but startling reason that he believed my uncle "would be dead by this time."

Very much shocked and frightened we stopped the carriage, and questioned the tremulous old porter.

Uncle Silas, it seemed, had been "silly-ish" all yesterday, and "could not be woke this morning," and "the doctor had been here twice, being now in the house."

"Is he better?" I asked tremblingly.

"Not as I'm aweer on, Miss; he lay at God's mercy two hours ago; 'appen he's in heaven be this time."

"Drive on — drive fast," I said to the driver. "Don't be frightened, Milly; please heaven we shall find all going well."

After some delay, during which my heart sank, and I quite gave up Uncle Silas, the aged little servant-man opened the door, and trotted shakily down the steps to the carriage side.

Uncle Silas had been at death's door for hours; the question of life had trembled in the scale; but now the Doctor said "he might do."



"Where was the Doctor?"

"In master's room; he blooded him three hours ago."

I don't think that Milly was so much frightened as I. My heart beat, and I was trembling so that I could hardly get up stairs.



## CHAPTER IX.

## A Friend Arises.

At the top of the great staircase I was glad to see the friendly face of Mary Quince, who stood, candle in hand, greeting us with many little courtesies, and a very haggard and pallid smile.

"Very welcome Miss, hoping you are very well."

"All well, and you are well, Mary? and oh, tell us quickly how is Uncle Silas."

"We thought he was gone, Miss, this morning, but doing fairly now; Doctor says in a trance like. I was helping old Wyat most of the day, and was there when Doctor blooded him, an' he spoke at last; but he must be awful weak, he took a deal o' blood from his arm, Miss; I held the basin."

"And he's better — decidedly better," I asked.

"Well, he's better, Doctor says; he talked some, and Doctor says if he goes off asleep again, and begins a snoring like he did before, we're to loose the bandage, and let him bleed till he comes to his self again; which, it seems to me and Wyat, is the same thing a'most as saying he's to be killed off hand, for I don't believe he has a drop to spare, as you'll say likewise, Miss, if you'll please look in the basin."

This was not an invitation with which I cared to comply. I thought I was going to faint. I sat on the stairs and sipped a little water, and Quince sprinkled a little in my face, and my strength returned.



Milly must have felt her father's danger more than I, for she was affectionate, and loved him from habit and relation, although he was not kind to her. But I was more nervous and more impetuous, and my feelings both stimulated and overpowered me more easily. The moment I was able to stand I said — thinking of nothing but the one idea —

“We must see him — *come*, Milly.”

I entered his sitting room; a common “dip” candle hanging like the tower of Pisa all to one side, with a dim, long wick, in a greasy candlestick profaned the table of the fastidious invalid. The light was little better than darkness, and I crossed the room swiftly, still transfixed by the one idea of seeing my uncle.

His bed-room door beside the fireplace stood partly open, and I looked in.

Old Wyat, a white, high-cauled ghost, was pottering in her slippers in the shadow at the far side of the bed. The Doctor, a stout little bald man, with a paunch and a big bunch of seals, stood with his back to the fireplace, which corresponded with that in the next room, eyeing his patient through the curtains of the bed with a listless sort of importance.

The head of the large four-poster rested against the opposite wall. Its foot was presented toward the fireplace; but the curtains at the side, which alone I could see from my position, were closed.

The little Doctor knew me, and thinking me, I suppose a person of consequence, removed his hands from behind him, suffering the skirts of his coat to fall forward, and with great celerity and gravity made me a low but important bow; then choosing more particularly to make my acquaintance he further advanced,



and with another reverence he introduced himself as Doctor Jolks, in a murmured diapason. He bowed me back again into my uncle's study, and the light of old Wyat's dreadful candle.

Doctor Jolks was suave and pompous. I longed for a fussy practitioner who would have got over the ground in half the time.

"Coma, madam, coma. Miss Ruthyn, your uncle, I may tell you has been in a very critical state; highly so. Coma of the most obstinate type. He would have sunk — he must have gone, in fact, had I not resorted to a very extreme remedy, and bled him freely, which happily told precisely as we could have wished. A wonderful constitution — a marvellous constitution — prodigious nervous fibre; the greatest pity in the world he won't give himself fair play. His habits, you know, are quite, I may say, destructive. We do our best — we do all we can, but if the patient won't co-operate it can't possibly end satisfactorily."

And Jolks accompanied this with an awful shrug. "Is there *anything*? Do you think change of air? What an awful complaint it is," I exclaimed.

He smiled, mysteriously looking down, and shook his head undertaker-like.

"Why, we can hardly call it a *complaint*, Miss Ruthyn. I look upon it he has been poisoned — he has had, you understand me," he pursued, observing my startled look, "an overdose of opium; you know he takes opium habitually; he takes it in laudanum, he takes it in water, and most dangerous of all, he takes it solid, in lozenges. I've known people take it moderately. I've known people take it to excess, *but* they all were particular as to *measure*, and *that* is ex-



actly the point I've tried to impress upon him. The habit, of course, you understand is formed, there's no uprooting that; but he won't *measure* — he goes by the eye and by sensation, which I need not tell you, Miss Ruthyn, is going by *chance*; and opium, as no doubt you are aware, is strictly a poison; a poison, no doubt, which habit will enable you to partake of, I may say, in considerable quantities, without fatal consequences, but still a poison; and to exhibit a poison so, is, I need scarcely tell you, to trifle with death. He has been so threatened, and for a time he changes his haphazard mode of dealing with it, and then returns; he may escape, of course, that is possible, but he may any day overdo the thing. I don't think the present crisis will result seriously. I am very glad, independently of the honour of making your acquaintance, Miss Ruthyn, that you and your cousin have returned; for, however zealous, I fear the servants are deficient in intelligence; and as in the event of a recurrence of the symptoms — which, however, is not probable — I would beg to inform you of their nature, and how exactly best to deal with them."

So upon these points he delivered us a pompous little lecture, and begged that either Milly or I would remain in the room with the patient until his return at two or three o'clock in the morning; a reappearance of the coma "might be very bad indeed."

Of course Milly and I did as we were directed. We sat by the fire, scarcely daring to whisper. Uncle Silas, about whom a new and dreadful suspicion began to haunt me, lay still and motionless as if he were actually dead.

"Had he attempted to poison himself?"



If he believed his position to be as desperate as Lady Knollys had described it, was this, after all, improbable? There were strange wild theories, I had been told, mixed up in his religion.

Sometimes, at an hour's interval, a sign of life would come — a moan from that tall sheeted figure in the bed — a moan and a pattering of the lips. Was it prayer — *what* was it? who could guess what thoughts were passing behind that white-filled forehead?

I had peeped at him: a white cloth steeped in vinegar and water was folded round his head; his great eyes were closed, so were his marble lips; his figure straight, thin, and long, dressed in a white dressing gown, looked like a corpse "laid out" in the bed; his gaunt bandaged arm lay outside the sheet that covered his body.

With this awful image of death we kept our vigil, until poor Milly grew so sleepy that old Wyatt proposed that she should take her place and watch with me.

Little as I liked the crone with the high-cauled cap, she would, at all events keep awake, which Milly could not. And so at one o'clock this new arrangement began.

"Mr. Dudley Ruthyn is not at home?" I whispered to old Wyatt.

"He went away wi' himself yesternight, to Cloper-ton, Miss, to see the wrestling; it was to come off this morning."

"Was he sent for?"

"Not he."

"And why not?"



"He would na' leave the sport for this, I'm thinking," and the old woman grinned uglily.

"When is he to return?"

"When he wants money."

So we grew silent, and again I thought of suicide, and of the unhappy old man, who just then whispered a sentence or two to himself with a sigh.

For the next hour he had been quite silent, and old Wyat informed me that she must go down for candles. Ours were already burnt down to the sockets.

"There's a candle in the next room," I suggested, hating the idea of being left alone with the patient.

"Hoot! Miss. I *dare* na' set a candle but wax in his presence," whispered the old woman, scornfully.

"I think if we were to stir the fire, and put on a little more coal, we should have a great deal of light."

"He'll ha' the candles," said Dame Wyat, doggedly; and she tottered from the chamber, muttering to herself; and I heard her take her candle from the next room and depart, shutting the outer door after her.

Here was I then alone, but for this unearthly companion, whom I feared inexpressibly, at two o'clock, in the vast old house of Bartram.

I stirred the fire. It was low, and would not blaze. I stood up, and with my hand on the mantelpiece, endeavoured to think of cheerful things. But it was a struggle against wind and tide — vain; and so I drifted away into haunted regions.

Uncle Silas was perfectly still. I would not suffer myself to think of the number of dark rooms and



passages which now separated me from the other living tenants of the house. I awaited with a false composure the return of old Wyat.

Over the mantelpiece was a looking-glass. At another time this might have helped to entertain my solitary moments, but now I did not like to venture a peep. A small thick Bible lay on the chimneypiece, and leaning its back against the mirror, I began to read in it with a mind as attentively directed as I could. While so engaged in turning over the leaves, I lighted upon two or three odd-looking papers, which had been folded into it. One was a broad printed thing, with names and dates written into blank spaces, and was about the size of a quarter of a yard of very broad ribbon. The others were mere scraps, with "Dudley Ruthyn" penned in my cousin's vulgar round-hand at the foot. While I folded and replaced these I really don't know what caused me to fancy that something was moving behind me, as I stood with my back toward the bed. I do not recollect any sound whatever; but instinctively I glanced into the mirror, and my eyes were instantly fixed by what I saw.

The figure of Uncle Silas rose up, and dressed in a long white morning gown, slid over the end of the bed, and with two or three swift noiseless steps, stood behind me, with a death-like scowl and a simper. Preternaturally tall and thin, he stood for a moment almost touching me, with the white bandage pinned across his forehead, his bandaged arm stiffly by his side, and diving over my shoulder, with his long thin hand he snatched the Bible, and whispered over my head — "The serpent beguiled her and she did eat;" and after a momentary pause, he glided to the farthest



window, and appeared to look out upon the midnight prospect.

It was cold, but he did not seem to feel it. With the same inflexible scowl and smile, he continued to look out for several minutes, and then with a great sigh, he sat down on the side of his bed, his face immoveably turned toward me, with the same painful look.

It seemed to me an hour before old Wyat came back; and never was lover made happier at sight of his mistress than I to behold that withered crone.

You may be sure I did not prolong my watch. There was now plainly no risk of my uncle's relapsing into lethargy. I had a long hysterical fit of weeping when I got into my room, with honest Mary Quince by my side.

Whenever I closed my eyes, the face of Uncle Silas was before me, as I had seen it reflected in the glass. The sorceries of Bartram were enveloping me once more.

Next morning the Doctor said he was quite out of danger, but very weak. Milly and I saw him; and again in our afternoon walk we met the Doctor marching under the trees in the direction of the Windmill Wood.

"Going down to see that poor girl there?" he said, when he had made his salutation, prodding with his levelled stick in the direction. "Hawke, or Hawkes, I think."

"Beauty's sick, Maud," exclaimed Milly.

"*Hawkes*. She's upon my dispensary list. Yes," said the Doctor, looking into his little note-book — "Hawkes."



"And what is her complaint?"

"Rheumatic fever."

"Not infectious?"

"Not the least — no more, as we say, Miss Ruthyn, than a broken leg," and he laughed obligingly.

So soon as the Doctor had departed, Milly and I agreed to follow to Hawkes' cottage and inquire more particularly how she was. To say truth, I am afraid it was rather for the sake of giving our walk a purpose and a point of termination, than for any very charitable interest we might have felt in the patient.

Over the inequalities of the upland slope, clumped with trees, we reached the gabled cottage, with its neglected little farm-yard. A rheumatic old woman was the only attendant; and, having turned her ear in an attitude of attention, which induced us in gradually exalted keys to inquire how Meg was, she informed us in very loud tones that she had long lost her hearing, and was perfectly deaf. And added considerably —

"When the man comes in 'appen he'll tell ye what ye want."

Through the door of a small room at the further end of that in which we were, we could see a portion of the narrow apartment of the patient, and hear her moans and the Doctor's voice.

"We'll see him, Milly, when he comes out. Let us wait here."

So we stood upon the door-stone awaiting him. The sounds of suffering had moved my compassion and interested us for the sick girl.

"Blest if here isn't Pegtop," said Milly.



And the weather-stained red coat, the swarthy forbidding face and sooty locks of old Hawkes loomed in sight, as he stumped, steadying himself with his stick, over the uneven pavement of the yard. He touched his hat gruffly to me; but did not seem half to like our being where we were, for he looked surlily, and scratched his head under his wide-awake.

"Your daughter is very ill, I'm afraid," said I.

"Ay — she'll be costin' me a handful, like her mother did," said Pegtop.

"I hope her room is comfortable, poor thing."

"Ay, that's it; she be comfortable enough, I warrant — more nor I. It be all Meg, and nout o' Dickon."

"When did her illness commence?" I asked.

"Day the mare wor shod — *Saturday*. I talked a bit wi' the workus folk, but they won't gi'e nout — dang 'em — an' how be *I* to do't? It be all'ays hard bread wi' Silas, an' a deal harder now she' ta'en them pains. I won't stan' it much longer. Gammon! If she keeps on that way I'll just cut. See how the workus fellahs 'ill like *that!*"

"The Doctor gives his services for nothing," I said.

"An' *does* nothin', bless him! ha, ha. No more nor that old deaf gammon there that costs me three tizzies a week, and haint worth a h'porth — no more nor Meg there, that's making all she can o' them pains. They be all a foolin' o' me, an' thinks I don't know't. Hey? *we'll* see."

All this time he was cutting a bit of tobacco into shreds on the window-stone.

"A workin' man be same as a hoss; if he baint



cared, he can't work — 't isn't in him:" and with these words, having by this time stuffed his pipe with tobacco, he poked the deaf lady, who was pattering about with her back toward him, rather viciously with the point of his stick, and signed for a light.

"It bain't in him, you can't git it out o' 'im, no more nor ye'll draw smoke out o' this," and he raised his pipe an inch or two, with his thumb on the bowl, "without backy and fire. 'T isn't in it."

"Maybe I can be of some use?" I said, thinking.

"Maybe," he rejoined.

By this time he received from the old deaf abigail a flaming roll of brown paper, and, touching his hat to me, he withdrew, lighting his pipe and sending up little white puffs, like the salute of a departing ship.

So he did not care to hear how his daughter was, and had only come here to light his pipe!

Just then the Doctor emerged.

"We have been waiting to hear how your poor patient is to-day?" I said.

"Very ill, indeed, and utterly neglected, I fear. If she were equal to it — but she's not — I think she ought to be removed to the hospital immediately."

"That poor old woman is quite deaf, and the man is so surly and selfish! Could you recommend a nurse who would stay here till she's better? I will pay her with pleasure and anything you think might be good for the poor girl."

So this was settled on the spot. Doctor Jolks was kind, like most men of his calling, and undertook to send the nurse from Feltram with a few comforts for the patient; and he called Dickon to the yard-gate, and



I suppose told him of the arrangement; and Milly and I went to the poor girl's door and asked, "May we come in?"

There was no answer. So with the conventional construction of silence, we entered. Her looks showed how ill she was. We adjusted her bed-clothes, and darkened the room, and did what we could for her — noting, beside, what her comfort chiefly required. She did not answer any questions. She did not thank us. I should almost have fancied that she had not perceived our presence, had I not observed her dark, sunken eyes once or twice turned up towards my face, with a dismal look of wonder and inquiry.

The girl was very ill, and we went every day to see her. Sometimes she would answer our questions — sometimes not. Thoughtful, observant, surly, she seemed; and as people like to be thanked, I sometimes wonder that we continued to throw our bread upon these ungrateful waters. Milly was specially impatient under this treatment, and protested against it, and finally refused to accompany me into poor Beauty's bed-room.

"I think, my good Meg," said I one day, as I stood by her bed — she was now recovering with the sure reascent of youth — "that you ought to thank Miss Milly."

"I'll *not* thank her," said Beauty, doggedly.

"Very well, Meg, I only thought I'd ask you, for I think you ought."

As I spoke, she very gently took just the tip of my finger, which hung close to her coverlet, in her fingers, and drew it beneath, and before I was aware, burying her head in the clothes, she suddenly clasped



my hand in both hers to her lips, and kissed it passionately, again and again, sobbing. I felt her tears.

I tried to withdraw my hand, but she held it with an angry pull, continuing to weep and kiss it.

"Do you wish to say anything, my poor Meg?" I asked.

"Nout, Miss," she sobbed gently; and she continued to kiss my hand and weep. But suddenly she said, "I won't thank Milly, for it's a' *you*; it baint her, she hadn't the thought — no, no, it's a' *you*, Miss. I cried hearty in the dark last night, thinkin' o' the apples, and the way I knocked them awa' wi' a pur o' my foot, the day father rapped me ower the head wi' his stick; it was kind o' *you* and very bad o' *me*. I wish you'd beat me, Miss; ye're better to me than father or mother — better to me than a'; an' I wish I could die for you, Miss, for I'm not fit to look at you."

I was surprised. I began to cry. I could have hugged poor Meg.

I did not know her history. I have never learned it since. She used to talk with the most utter self-abasement before me. It was no religious feeling — it was a kind of expression of her love and worship of me — all the more strange that she was naturally very proud. There was nothing she would not have borne from me except the slightest suspicion of her entire devotion, or that she could in the most trifling way wrong or deceive me.

I am not young now. I have had my sorrows, and with them all that wealth, virtually unlimited, can command; and through the retrospect a few bright and pure lights quiver along my life's dark stream — dark, but for them; and these are shed, not by the splendour







## CHAPTER X.

## A Chapter-Full of Lovers.

WE had about this time a pleasant and quite unexpected visit from Lord Ilbury. He had come to pay his respects, understanding that my Uncle Silas was sufficiently recovered to see visitors. "And I think I'll run up-stairs first, and see him, if he admits me, and then I have ever so long a message from my sister Mary, for you and Miss Millicent; but I had better dispose of my business first — don't you think so? — and I shall return in a few minutes."

And as he spoke our tremulous old butler returned to say that Uncle Silas would be happy to see him. So he departed; and you can't think how pleasant our homely sitting-room looked with his coat and stick in it — guarantees of his return.

"Do you think, Milly, he is going to speak about the timber, you know, that Cousin Knollys spoke of? I do hope not."

"So do I," said Milly. "I wish he'd stayed a bit longer with us first, for if he does, father will sure to turn him out of doors, and we'll see no more of him."

"Exactly, my dear Milly; and he's so pleasant and good-natured."

"And he likes you awful well, he does."

"I'm sure he likes us both equally, Milly; he talked a great deal to you at Elverston, and used to ask you so often to sing those two pretty Lancashire ballads," I said; "but you know when you were at



your controversies and religious exercises in the window, with that pillar of the church, the Rev. Spriggs Biddlepen —”

“Get awa’ wi’ your nonsense, Maud; how could I help answering when he dodged me up and down my Testament and catechism? — an I ’most hate him, I tell you, you and Cousin Knollys, you’re such fools, I do. And whatever you say, the lord likes you uncommon, and well you know it, ye hussy.”

“I know no such thing; and you don’t think it, *you* hussy, and I really don’t care who likes me or who doesn’t, except my relations; and I make the lord a present to you, if you’ll have him.”

In this strain were we talking when he re-entered the room, a little sooner than we had expected to see him.

Milly, who, you are to recollect, was only in process of reformation, and still retained something of the Derbyshire dairymaid, gave me a little clandestine pinch on the arm just as he made his appearance.

“I just refused a present from her,” said odious Milly, in answer to his inquiring look, “because I knew she could not spare it.”

The effect of all this was that I blushed one of my overpowering blushes. People told me they became me very much; I hope so, for the misfortune was frequent; and I think nature owed me that compensation.

“It places you both in a most becoming light,” said Lord Ilbury, quite innocently. “I really don’t know which most to admire — the generosity of the offer or of the refusal.”

“Well, it *was* kind, if you but knew. I’m ’most tempted to tell him,” said Milly.



I checked her with a really angry look, and said "Perhaps you have not observed it; but I really think, for a sensible person, my Cousin Milly here talks more nonsense than any twenty other girls."

"A twenty-girl power! That's an immense compliment. I've the greatest respect for nonsense, I owe it so much; and I really think if nonsense were banished, the earth would grow insupportable."

"Thank you, Lord Ilbury," said Milly, who had grown quite easy in his company during our long visit at Elverston; "and I tell you, Miss Maud, if you grow saucy, I'll accept your present, and what will you say then?"

"I really don't know; but just now I want to ask Lord Ilbury how he thinks my uncle looks; neither I nor Milly have seen him since his illness."

"Very much weaker, I think; but he may be gaining strength. Still, as my business was not quite pleasant, I thought it better to postpone it, and if you think it would be right, I'll write to Doctor Bryerly to ask him to postpone the discussion for a little time."

I at once assented, and thanked him; indeed if I had had my way, the subject should never have been mentioned, I felt so hard-hearted and rapacious; but Lord Ilbury explained that the trustees were constrained by the provisions of the will, and that I really had no power to release them; and I hoped that Uncle Silas also understood all this.

"And now," said he, "we've returned to Grange, my sister and I, and it is nearer than Elverston, so that we are really neighbours; and Mary wants Lady Knollys to fix a time — she owes us a visit, you know — and you really must come at the same time; it will



be so very pleasant, the same party exactly meeting in a new scene; and we have not half explored our neighbourhood; and I've got down all those Spanish engravings I told you of, and the Venetian missals, and all the rest. I think I remember very accurately the things you were most interested by, and they're all there; and really you must promise, you and Miss Millicent Ruthyn. And I forgot to mention — you know you complained that you were ill supplied with books, so Mary thought you would allow her to share her supply — they are the new books, you know — and when you have read yours, you and she can exchange."

What girl was ever quite frank about her likings? I don't think I was more of a cheat than others; but I never could tell of myself. It is quite true that this duplicity and reserve seldom deceives. Our hypocrisies are forced upon some of our sex by the acuteness and vigilance of all in this field of inquiry; but if we are sly we are also lynx-eyed, capital detectives, most ingenious in fitting together the bits and dovetails of a cumulative case; and in those affairs of love and liking, have a terrible exploratory instinct, and so, for the most part, when detected, we are found out not only to be in love, but to be rogues moreover.

Lady Mary was very kind; but had Lady Mary of her own mere motion, taken all this trouble? Was there no more energetic influence at the bottom of that welcome chest of books, which arrived only half an hour later? The circulating library of those days was not the epidemic and ubiquitous influence to which it has grown; and there were many places where it could not find you out.



Altogether that evening Bartram had acquired a peculiar beauty — a bright and mellow glow, in which, even its gate-posts and wheelbarrow were interesting, and next day came a little cloud — Dudley appeared.

"You may be sure he wants money," said Milly. "He and father had words this morning."

He took a chair at our luncheon, found fault with everything in his own laconic dialect, ate a good deal notwithstanding, and was sulky, and with Milly, snappish. To me, on the contrary, when Milly went into the hall, he was mild and whimpering, and disposed to be confidential.

"There's the Governor says he hasn't a bob! Danged if I know how an old fellah in his bedroom muddles away money at that rate. I don't suppose he thinks I can git along without tin, and he knows them trustees won't gi'e me a tizzy till they gets what they calls an opinion — dang 'em! Bryerly says he doubts it must all go under settlement. They'll settle me nicely if they do; and Governor knows all about it, and won't gi'e me a danged brass farthin', an' me wi' bills to pay an' lawyers — dang 'em — writing letters. He knows summat o' that hisself, does Governor; and he might ha' consideration a bit for his own flesh and blood, *I* say. But he never does nout for none but hisself. I'll sell his books and his jewels next fit he takes — that's how I'll fit him."

This amiable young man, glowering, with his elbows on the table and his fingers in his great whiskers, followed his homily, where clergymen append the blessing, with a muttered variety of very different matter.



"Now, Maud," said he, pathetically, leaning back suddenly in his chair, with all his conscious beauty and misfortunes in his face; "is not it hard lines?"

I thought the appeal was going to shape itself into an application for money; but it did not.

"I never know'd a reel beauty — first-chop, of course, I mean — that wasn't kind along of it, and I'm a fellah as can't git along without sympathy — that's why I say it — an' isn't it hard lines? Now, *say* it's hard lines — *haint* it, Maud?"

I did not know exactly what hard lines meant, but I said —

"I suppose it is very disagreeable."

And with this concession, not caring to hear any more in the same vein, I rose, intending to take my departure.

"No, that's jest it. I knew ye'd say it, Maud. Ye're a kind lass — ye be — 'tis in yer pretty face. I like ye awful, I do — there's not a handsomer lass in Liverpool nor Lunnon itself — *no* where."

He had seized my hand, and trying to place his arm about my waist, essayed that salute which I had so narrowly escaped on my first introduction.

"*Don't*, sir," I exclaimed, in high indignation, escaping at the same moment from his grasp.

"No offence, lass; no harm, Maud; you must not be so shy — we're cousins, ye know — an' I wouldn't hurt ye, Maud, no more nor I'd knock my head off. I wouldn't."

I did not wait to hear the rest of his tender protestations; but, without showing how nervous I was, I glided out of the room quietly, making an orderly re-



treat, the more meritorious as I heard him call after me persuasively —

“Come back, Maud. What are ye afeard on, lass? Come back, I say — do now; there’s a good wench.”

As Milly and I were taking our walk that day, in the direction of the Windmill Wood, to which, in consequence perhaps of some secret order, we had now free access, we saw Beauty, for the first time since her illness, in the little yard, throwing grain to the poultry.

“How do you find yourself to-day, Meg? I am *very* glad to see you able to be about again; but I hope it is not too soon.”

We were standing at the barred gate of the little enclosure, and quite close to Meg, who, however, did not choose to raise her head; but, continuing to shower her grain and potato skins among her hens and chickens, said in a low tone —

“Father baint in sight? Look jist round a bit and say if ye see him.”

But Dickon’s dusky red costume was nowhere visible.

So Meg looked up, pale and thin, and with her old grave, observant eyes, and she said quietly —

“’Tisn’t that I’m not glad to see ye; but if father was to spy me talking friendly wi’ ye, now that I’m hearty, and you havin’ no more call to me, he’d be all’ays a watching and thinkin’ I was tellin’ o’ tales, and ’appen he’d want me to worrit ye for money, Miss Maud; an’ ’tisn’t here he’d spend it, but in the Feltram pottusses, he would, and we want for nothin’ that’s good for us. But that’s how ’twould be, an’ he’d



all'ays be a jawing and a lickin' of I; so don't mind me, Miss Maud, and 'appen I might do ye a good turn some day."

A few days after this little interview with Meg, as Milly and I were walking briskly — for it was a clear frosty day — along the pleasant slopes of the sheep-walk, we were overtaken by Dudley Ruthyn. It was not a pleasant surprise. There was this mitigation, however; we were on foot, and he driving in a dog-cart along the track leading to the moor, with his dogs and gun. He brought his horse for a moment to a walk, and with a careless nod to me, removing his short pipe from his mouth, he said —

"Governor's callin' for ye, Milly; and he told me to send you slick home to him if I saw you, and I think he'll gi'e ye some money; but ye better take him while he's in the humour, lass, or mayhap ye'll go long without."

And with those words, apparently intent on his game, he nodded again, and, pipe in mouth, drove at a quick trot over the slope of the hill, and disappeared.

So I agreed to await Milly's return while she ran home, and rejoined me where I was. Away she ran, in high spirits, and I wandered listlessly about in search of some convenient spot to sit down upon, for I was a little tired.

She had not been gone five minutes, when I heard a step approaching, and looking round, saw the dog-cart close by, the horse browsing on the short grass, and Dudley Ruthyn within a few paces of me.

"Ye see, Maud, I've bin thinkin' why you're so vexed wi' me, an' I thought I'd jest come back an'



ask ye what I may a' done to anger ye so; there's no sin in that, I think — is there?"

"I'm not angry. I did not say so. I hope that's enough," I said, startled; and, notwithstanding my speech, *very* angry, for I felt instinctively that Milly's despatch homeward was a mere trick, and I the dupe of this coarse stratagem.

"Well then, if ye baint angry, so much the better, Maud. I only want to know why you're afeard o' me. I never struck a man foul, much less hurt a girl, in my days; besides, Maud, I likes ye too well to hurt ye. Dang it, lass, you're my cousin, ye know, and cousins is all'ays together and lovin' like, an' none says again it."

"I've nothing to explain — there *is* nothing to explain. I've been quite friendly," I said, hurriedly.

"*Friendly!* Well, if there baint a cram! How can ye think it friendly, Maud, when ye won't a'most shake hands wi' me? It's enough to make a fellah swear, or cry a'most. Why d'ye like aggravatin' a poor devil? Now baint ye an ill-natured little puss, Maud, an' I likin' ye so well? You're the prettiest lass in Derbyshire; there's nothin' I wouldn't do for ye."

And he backed his declaration with an oath.

"Be so good, then, as to re-enter your dog-cart and drive away," I replied, very much incensed.

"Now, there it is again! Ye can't speak me civil. Another fella'd fly out, an' maybe kiss ye for spite; but I baint that sort, I'm all for coaxin' and kindness, an' ye won't let me. What *be* you drivin' at, Maud?"

"I think I've said very plainly, sir, that I wish to be alone. You've *nothing* to say, except utter nonsense,



and I've heard quite enough. Once for all, I beg, sir, that you will be so good as to leave me."

"Well, now, look here, Maud; I'll do anything you like — burn me if I don't — if you'll only jest be kind to me, like cousins should. What did I ever do to vex you? If you think I like any lass better than you — some fellah at Elverston's bin talkin', maybe — it's nout but lies an' nonsense. Not but there's lots o' wenches likes me well enough, though I be a plain lad, and speaks my mind straight out."

"I can't see that you are so frank, sir, as you describe; you have just played a shabby trick to bring about this absurd and most disagreeable interview."

"And supposin' I did send that fool, Milly, out o' the way, to talk a bit wi' you here, where's the harm? Dang it, lass, ye musn't be too hard. Didn't I say I'd do whatever ye wished?"

"And you *won't*," said I.

"Ye mean to get along out o' this? Well, now, I *will*. There! No use, of course, askin' you to kiss and be friends, before I go, as cousins should. Well, don't be riled, lass, I'm not askin' it; only mind, I do like you awful, and 'appen I'll find ye in better humour another time. Good-by, Maud; I'll make ye like me at last."

And with these words, to my comfort, he addressed himself to his horse and pipe, and was soon honestly on his way to the moor.

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## CHAPTER XI.

## The Rivals.

ALL the time that Dudley chose to persecute me with his odious society, I continued to walk at a brisk pace toward home, so that I had nearly reached the house when Milly met me, with a note which had arrived for me by the post, in her hand.

"Here, Milly, are more verses. He is a very persevering poet, whoever he is." So I broke the seal; but this time it was prose. And the first words were "Captain Oakley!"

I confess to an odd sensation as these remarkable words met my eye. It might possibly be a proposal. I did not wait to speculate, however, but read these sentences traced in the identical handwriting which had copied the lines with which I had been twice favoured.

"Captain Oakley presents his compliments to Miss Ruthyn, and trusts she will excuse his venturing to ask whether, during his short stay in Feltram, he might be permitted to pay his respects at Bartram-Haugh. He has been making a short visit to his aunt, and could not find himself so near without at least attempting to renew an acquaintance which he has never ceased to cherish in memory. If Miss Ruthyn would



be so very good as to favour him with ever so short a reply to the question he ventures most respectfully to ask, her decision would reach him at the Hall Hotel, Feltram."

"Well, he's a round-about fellah, anyhow. Couldn't he come up and see you if he wanted to? They poeters, they do love writing long yarns — don't they?" And with this reflection, Milly took the note and read it through again.

"It's jolly polite anyhow, isn't it Maud?" said Milly, who had conned it over, and accepted it as a model composition.

I must have been, I think, naturally a rather shrewd girl; and considering how very little I had seen of the world — nothing in fact — I often wonder now at the sage conclusions at which I arrived.

Were I to answer this handsome and cunning fool according to his folly, in what position should I find myself? No doubt my reply would induce a rejoinder, and that compel another note from me, and that invite yet another from him; and however his might improve in warmth, they were sure not to abate. Was it his impertinent plan, with this show of respect and ceremony, to drag me into a clandestine correspondence? Inexperienced girl as I was, I fired at the idea of becoming his dupe, and fancying, perhaps, that there was more in merely answering his note than it would have amounted to, I said —

"That kind of thing may answer very well with button-makers, but ladies don't like it. What would your papa think of it if he found that I had been



writing to him, and seeing him without his permission? If he wanted to see me he could have" — (I really did not know exactly what he could have done) — "he could have timed his visit to Lady Knollys differently; at all events, he has no right to place me in an embarrassing situation, and I am certain Cousin Knollys would say so; and I think his note both shabby and impertinent."

Decision was not with me an intellectual process. When quite cool I was the most undecided of mortals, but once my feelings were excited I was prompt and bold.

"I'll give the note to Uncle Silas," I said, quickening my pace toward home; "he'll know what to do."

But Milly, who, I fancy, had no objection to the little romance which the young officer proposed, told me that she could not see her father, that he was ill, and not speaking to any-one.

"And arn't ye making a plaguy row about nothin'? I lay a guinea if ye had never set eyes on Lord Ilbury you'd a told him to come, and see ye, an' welcome."

"Don't talk like a fool, Milly. You never knew me do anything deceitful. Lord Ilbury has no more to do with it, you know very well, than the man in the moon."

I was altogether very indignant. I did not speak another word to Milly. The proportions of the house are so great that it is a much longer walk than you would suppose from the hall-door to Uncle Silas's room. But I did not cool all that way; and it was not till I had just reached the lobby, and saw the sour, jealous face, and high caul of old Wyat, and felt the influence of that neighbourhood, that I paused to reconsider. I



fancied there was a cool consciousness of success behind all the deferential phraseology of Captain Oakley, which nettled me extremely. No; there could be no doubt. I tapped softly at the door.

"What is it *now*, Miss?" snarled the querulous old woman, with her shrivelled fingers on the door-handle.

"Can I see my uncle for a moment?"

"He's tired, and not a word from him all day long."

"Not ill, though?"

"Awful bad in the night," said the old crone, with a sudden savage glare in my face, as if *I* had brought it about.

"Oh! I'm very sorry. I had not heard a word of it."

"No one does but old Wyat. There's Milly there never asks neither — his own child!"

"Weakness, or what?"

"One o' them fits. He'll slide awa' in one o' them some day, and no one but old Wyat to know nor ask word about it; that's how 'twill be."

"Will you please hand him this note, if he is well enough to look at it, and say I am at the door?"

She took it with a peevish nod and a grunt, closing the door in my face, and in a few minutes returned —

"Come in wi' ye," said Dame Wyat, and I appeared.

Uncle Silas, who, after his nightly horror or vision, lay extended on a sofa, with his faded yellow silk dressing gown about him, his long white hair hanging toward the ground, and that wild and feeble smile



lighting his face — a glimmer I feared to look upon — his long thin arms lay by his sides, with hands and fingers that stirred not, except when now and then, with a feeble motion, he wet his temples and forehead with eau de Cologne from a glass saucer placed beside him.

“Excellent girl! dutiful ward and niece!” murmured the oracle; “heaven reward you — your frank dealing is your own safety and my peace. Sit you down, and say who is this Captain Oakley, when you made his acquaintance, what his age, fortune, and expectations, and who the aunt he mentions.”

Upon all these points I satisfied him as fully as I was able.

“Wyat — the white drops,” he called in a thin, stern tone. “I’ll write a line presently. I can’t see visitors, and, of course, you can’t receive young captains before you’ve come out. Farewell! God bless you, dear.”

Wyat was dropping the “white” restorative into a wine-glass and the room was redolent of ether. I was glad to escape. The figures and whole *mise en scène* were unearthly.

“Well, Milly,” I said, as I met her in the hall, “your papa is going to write to him.”

I sometimes wonder whether Milly was right, and how I should have acted a few months earlier.

Next day whom should we meet in the Windmill Wood but Captain Oakley. The spot where this interesting *rencontre* occurred was near that ruinous bridge on my sketch of which I had received so many compliments. It was so great a surprise that I had not time to recollect my indignation, and, having received him



very affably, I found it impossible, during our brief interview, to recover my lost altitude.

After our greetings were over, and some compliments neatly made, he said —

“I had such a curious note from Mr. Silas Ruthyn. I am sure he thinks me a very impertinent fellow, for it was really anything but inviting — extremely rude, in fact. But I could not quite see that because he does not want me to invade his bed-room — an incursion I never dreamed of — I was not to present myself to you, who had already honoured me with your acquaintance, with the sanction of those who were most interested in your welfare, and who were just as well qualified as he, I fancy, to say who were qualified for such an honour.”

“My uncle, Mr. Silas Ruthyn, you are aware, is my guardian; and this is my cousin, his daughter.”

This was an opportunity of becoming a little lofty, and I improved it. He raised his hat and bowed to Milly.

“I’m afraid I’ve been very rude and stupid. Mr. Ruthyn, of course, has a perfect right to — to — in fact, I was not the least aware that I had the honour of so near a relation’s — a — a — and what exquisite scenery you have. I think this country round Feltram particularly fine; and this Bartram-Haugh is, I venture to say, about the very most beautiful spot in this beautiful region. I do assure you I am tempted beyond measure to make Feltram and the Hall Hotel my headquarters for at least a week. I only regret the foliage; but your trees show wonderfully, even in winter, so many of them have got that ivy about them. They say it spoils trees, but it certainly beautifies them. I



have just ten days' leave unexpired; I wish I could induce you to advise me how to apply them. What shall I do, Miss Ruthyn?"

"I am the worst person in the world to make plans, even for myself, I find it so troublesome. What do you say? Suppose you try Wales or Scotland, and climb up some of those fine mountains that look so well in winter?"

"I should much prefer Feltram. I so wish you would recommend *it*. What is this pretty plant?"

"We call that Maud's myrtle. She planted it, and it's very pretty when it's full in blow," said Milly.

Our visit to Elverston had been of immense use to us both.

"Oh! planted by *you*?" he said, very softly, with a momentary corresponding glance. "May I — ever so little — just a leaf?"

And without waiting for permission, he held a sprig of it next his waistcoat.

"Yes, it goes very prettily with those buttons. They are *very* pretty buttons; are not they, Milly? A present, a souvenir, I dare say?"

This was a terrible hit at the button-maker, and I thought he looked a little oddly at me, but my countenance was so "bewitchingly simple" that I suppose his suspicions were allayed.

Now, it was very odd of me, I must confess, to talk in this way, and to receive all those tender allusions from a gentleman about whom I had spoken and felt so sharply only the evening before. But Bartram was abominably lonely. A civilised person was a valuable waif or stray in that region of the picturesque and the brutal; and to my lady reader especially, be-



cause she will probably be hardest upon me, I put it — can you not recollect any such folly in your own past life? Can you not in as many minutes call to mind at least six similar inconsistencies of your own practising? For my part, I really can't see the advantage of being the weaker sex if we are always to be as strong as our masculine neighbours.

There was, indeed, no revival of the little sentiment which I had once experienced. When these things once expire I do believe they are as hard to revive as our dead lap-dogs, guinea-pigs and parrots. It was my perfect coolness which enabled me to chat, I flatter myself, so agreeably with the refined Captain, who plainly thought me his captive, and was probably now and then thinking what was to be done to utilize that little bit of Bartram, or to beautify some other, when he should see fit to become its master, as we rambled over these wild but beautiful grounds.

It was just about then that Milly nudged me rather vehemently, and whispered "Look there!"

I followed with mine the direction of her eyes, and saw my odious cousin, Dudley, in a flagrant pair of cross-barred pegtops, and what Milly before her reformation used to call other "slops" of corresponding atrocity approaching our refined little party with great strides. I really think that Milly was very nearly ashamed of him. I certainly was. I had no apprehension, however, of the scene which was imminent.

The charming Captain mistook him probably for some rustic servant of the place, for he continued his agreeable remarks up to the very moment when Dudley, whose face was pale with anger, and whose rapid advance had not served to cool him, without recollecting



to salute either Milly or me, accosted our elegant companion as follows: —

“By your leave, Master, baint you summat in the wrong box here, don’t you think?”

He had planted himself directly in his front, and looked unmistakably menacing.

“May I speak to him? Will you excuse me?” said the Captain blandly.

“Ow — ay, they’ll excuse ye ready enough, I dessay; you’re to deal wi’ me though. Baint ye in the wrong box now?”

“I’m not conscious, sir, of being in a box at all,” replied the Captain, with severe disdain. “It strikes me you are disposed to get up a row. Let us, if you please, get a little apart from the ladies if that is your purpose.”

“I mean to turn you out o’ this the way ye came. If you make a row so much the wuss for you, for I’ll lick ye to fits.”

“Tell him not to fight,” whispered Milly; “he’ll a’ no chance wi’ Dudley.”

I saw Dickon Hawkes grinning over the paling on which he leaned.

“Mr. Hawkes,” I said, drawing Milly with me toward that unpromising mediator, “pray prevent unpleasantness and go between them.”

“An’ git licked o’ both sides? Rather not, Miss, thank ye,” grinned Dickon, tranquilly.

“Who are you, sir?” demanded our romantic acquaintance, with military sternness.

“I’ll tell you who you are — you’re Oakley, as stops at the Hall, that Governor wrote, over night, not to dare show your nose inside the grounds. You’re a



half-starved cappen, come down here to look for a wife, and — —”

Before Dudley could finish his sentence, Captain Oakley, than whose face no regimentals could possibly have been more scarlet, at that moment, struck with his switch at Dudley's handsome features.

I don't know how it was done — by some “devilish cantrip slight.” A smack was heard, and the Captain lay on his back on the ground, with his mouth full of blood.

“How do ye like the taste o' that?” roared Dickon, from his post of observation.

In an instant Captain Oakley was on his feet again, hatless, looking quite frantic, and striking out at Dudley, who was ducking and dipping quite coolly, and again the same horrid sound, only this time it was double, like a quick postman's knock, and Captain Oakley was on the grass again.

“Tapped his smeller, by ——,” thundered Dickon, with a roar of laughter.

“Come away, Milly, I'm growing ill,” said I.

“Drop it, Dudley, I tell ye; you'll kill him,” screamed Milly.

But the devoted Captain, whose nose and mouth and shirt-front formed now but one great patch of blood, and who was bleeding beside over one eye, dashed at him again.

I turned away. I felt quite faint, and on the point of crying, with mere horror.

“Hammer away at his knocker,” bellowed Dickon, in a frenzy of delight.

“He'll break it now, if it ain't already,” cried



Milly, alluding, as I afterwards understood, to the Captain's Grecian nose.

"Brayvo, little un!" The Captain was considerably the taller.

Another smack, and, I suppose, Captain Oakley fell once more.

"Hooray! the dinner-service again, by——," roared Dickon. "Stick to that. Over the same ground — sub-soil, I say. He han't enough yet."

In a perfect tremor of disgust, I was making as quick a retreat as I could, and as I did, I heard Captain Oakley shriek hoarsely —

"You're a d—— prizefighter; I can't box you."

"I told ye I'd lick ye to fits," hooted Dudley.

"But you're the son of a gentleman, and by—— you shall fight me *as* a gentleman."

A yell of hooting laughter from Dudley and Dickon followed this sally.

"Gie my love to the Colonel, and think o' me when ye look in the glass — won't ye? An' so you're goin' arter all; well, follow what's left o' yer nose. Ye forgot some o' yer ivories — didn't ye — on th' grass?"

These and many similar jibes followed the mangled Captain in his retreat.



## CHAPTER XII.

Doctor Bryerly Reappears.

No one who has not experienced it can imagine the nervous disgust and horror which such a spectacle as we had been forced in part to witness, leaves upon the mind of a young person of my peculiar temperament.

It affected ever after my involuntary estimate of the principal actors in it. An exhibition of such thorough inferiority, accompanied by such a shock to the feminine sense of elegance, is not forgotten by any woman. Captain Oakley had been severely beaten by a smaller man. It was pitiable, but also undignified; and Milly's anxieties about his teeth and nose, though in a certain sense horrible, had also a painful suspicion of the absurd.

People say, on the other hand, that superior prowess, even in such barbarous contests, inspires in our sex an interest akin to admiration. I can positively say in my case it was quite the reverse. Dudley Ruthyn stood lower than ever in my estimation; for though I feared him more, it was by reason of these brutal and cold-blooded associations.

After this I lived in constant apprehension of being summoned to my uncle's room, and being called on for an explanation of my meeting with Captain Oakley, which, notwithstanding my perfect innocence, looked suspiciously, but no such inquisition resulted. Perhaps he did not suspect me; or, perhaps, he thought, not in



his haste, all women are liars, and did not care to hear what I might say. I rather lean to the latter interpretation.

The exchequer just now, I suppose, by some means, was replenished, for next morning Dudley set off upon one of his fashionable excursions, as poor Milly thought them, to Wolverhampton. And the same day Doctor Bryerly arrived.

Milly and I, from my room window, saw him step from his vehicle to the court-yard.

A lean man with sandy hair and whiskers was in the chaise with him. Doctor Bryerly descended in the unchangeable black suit that always looked new and never fitted him.

The Doctor looked careworn, and older, I thought, by several years, than when I last saw him. He was not shown up to my uncle's room; on the contrary, Milly, who was more actively curious than I, ascertained that our tremulous butler informed him that my uncle was not sufficiently well for an interview. Whereupon Doctor Bryerly had pencilled a note the reply to which was a message from Uncle Silas, saying that he would be happy to see him in five minutes.

As Milly and I were conjecturing what it might mean, and before the five minutes had expired, Mary Quince entered.

"Wyat bid me tell you, Miss, your uncle wants you *this minute*."

When I entered his room, Uncle Silas was seated at the table, with his desk before him. He looked up. Could anything be more dignified, suffering, and venerable?

"I sent for you, dear," he said very gently, ex-



tending his thin, white hand, and taking mine, which he held affectionately while he spoke, "because I desire to have no secrets, and wish you thoroughly to know all that concerns your own interests while subject to my guardianship; and I am happy to think, my beloved niece, that you requite my candour. Oh, here is the gentleman. Sit down, dear."

Doctor Bryerly was advancing, as it seemed, to shake hands with Uncle Silas, who, however, rose with a severe and haughty air, not the least over-acted, and made him a slow, ceremonious bow. I wondered how the homely Doctor could confront so tranquilly that astounding statue of hauteur.

A faint and weary smile, rather sad than contemptuous, was the only sign he showed of feeling his repulse.

"How do *you* do, Miss?" he said, extending his hand, and greeting me after his ungallant fashion, as if it were an after-thought.

"I think I may as well take a chair, sir," said Doctor Bryerly, sitting down serenely, near the table, and crossing his ungainly legs.

My uncle bowed.

"You understand the nature of the business, sir. Do you wish Miss Ruthyn to remain?" asked Doctor Bryerly.

"I *sent* for her, sir," replied my uncle, in a very gentle and sarcastic tone, a smile on his thin lips, and his strangely-contorted eyebrows raised for a moment contemptuously. "This gentleman, my dear Maud, thinks proper to insinuate that I am robbing you. It surprises me a little, and, no doubt, you — I've nothing to conceal, and wished you to be present while he



favours me more particularly with his views. I'm right, I think, in describing it as *robbery*, sir?"

"Why," said Doctor Bryerly thoughtfully, for he was treating the matter as one of right, and not of feeling, "it would be, certainly, taking that which does not belong to you, and converting it to your own use; but, at the worst, it would more resemble *thieving*, I think, than robbery."

I saw Uncle Silas's lip, eyelid, and thin cheek quiver and shrink, as if with a thrill of *tic douloureux*, as Doctor Bryerly spoke this unconsciously insulting answer. My uncle had, however, the self-command which is learned at the gaming-table. He shrugged, with a chilly, sarcastic, little laugh, and a glance at me.

"Your note says *waste*, I think, sir?"

"Yes, waste — the felling and sale of timber in the Windmill Wood, the selling of oak bark and burning of charcoal, as I'm informed," said Bryerly, as sadly and quietly as a man might relate a piece of intelligence from the newspaper.

"Detectives? or private spies of your own? — or, perhaps, my servants, bribed with my poor brother's money? A very high-minded procedure."

"Nothing of the kind, sir."

My uncle sneered.

"I mean, sir, there has been no undue canvass for evidence, and the question is simply one of right; and it is our duty to see that this inexperienced young lady is not defrauded."

"By her own uncle?"

"By anyone," said Doctor Bryerly, with a natural impenetrability that excited my admiration.



"Of course you come armed with an opinion?" said my smiling uncle, insinuatingly.

"The case is before Mr. Sergeant Grinders. These bigwigs don't return their cases sometimes so quickly as we could wish."

"Then you have *no* opinion?" smiled my uncle.

"My solicitor is quite clear upon it; and it seems to me there can be no question raised, but for form's sake."

"Yes, for form's sake you take one, and in the meantime, upon a nice question of law, the surmises of a thick-headed attorney and of an ingenious apoth — I beg pardon, physician — are sufficient warrant for telling my niece and ward, in my presence, that I am defrauding her!"

My uncle leaned back in his chair, and smiled with a contemptuous patience over Doctor Bryerly's head, as he spoke.

"I don't know whether I used that expression, sir, but I am speaking merely in a technical sense. I mean to say, that, whether by mistake or otherwise, you are exercising a power which you don't lawfully possess, and that the effect of that is to impoverish the estate, and, by so much as it benefits you, to wrong this young lady."

"I'm a technical defrauder, I see, and your manner conveys the rest. I thank my God, sir, I am a *very* different man from what I once was." Uncle Silas was speaking in a low tone, and with extraordinary deliberation. "I remember when I should have certainly knocked you down, sir, or *tried* it, at least, for a great deal less."

"But seriously, sir, what *do* you propose?" asked



Doctor Bryerly, sternly and a little flushed, for I think the old man was stirred within him; and though he did not raise his voice, his manner was excited.

"I propose to defend my rights, sir," murmured Uncle Silas very grim. "I'm not without an opinion, though you are."

"You seem to think, sir, that I have a pleasure in annoying you; you are quite wrong. I hate annoying anyone — constitutionally — I *hate* it; but don't you see, sir, the position I'm placed in? I wish I could please everyone, and do my duty."

Uncle Silas bowed and smiled.

"I've brought with me the Scotch steward from Tolkingden, *your* estate, Miss, and if you let us we will visit the spot and make a note of what we observe, that is, assuming that you admit waste, and merely question our law."

"If you please, sir, you and your Scotchman shall do *no such thing*; and, bearing in mind that I neither deny nor admit anything, you will please further never more to present yourself, under any pretext whatsoever, either in this house or on the grounds of Bartram-Haugh, during my lifetime."

Uncle Silas rose up with the same glassy smile and scowl, in token that the interview was ended.

"Good-bye, sir," said Doctor Bryerly, with a sad and thoughtful air, and hesitating for a moment, he said to me, "Do you think, Miss, you could afford me a word in the hall?"

"Not a word, sir," snarled Uncle Silas, with a white flash from his eyes.

There was a pause.

"Sit where you are, Maud."



Another pause.

"If you have anything to say to my ward, sir, you will please to say it *here*."

Doctor Bryerly's dark and homely face was turned on me with an expression of unspeakable compassion.

"I was going to say, that if you think of any way in which I can be of the least service, Miss, I'm ready to act, that's all; mind, *any* way."

He hesitated, looking at me with the same expression as if he had something more to say; but he only repeated —

"That's all, Miss."

"Won't you shake hands, Doctor Bryerly, before you go," I said, eagerly approaching him.

Without a smile, with the same sad anxiety in his face, with his mind, as it seemed to me, on something else, and irresolute whether to speak it or be silent, he took my fingers in a very cold hand, and holding it so, and slowly shaking it, his grave and troubled glance unconsciously rested on Uncle Silas's face, while in a sad tone and absent way he said —

"Good-bye, Miss."

From before that sad gaze my uncle averted his strange eyes quickly, and looked, oddly, to the window.

In a moment more Doctor Bryerly let my hand go with a sigh, and with an abrupt little nod to me, he left the room; and I heard that dismallest of sounds, the retreating footsteps of a true friend, *lost*.

"Lead us not into temptation; if we pray so we must not mock the eternal Majesty of Heaven by walking into temptation of our own accord."

This oracular sentence was not uttered by my uncle until Doctor Bryerly had been gone at least five minutes.



"I've forbid him my house, Maud; first, because his perfectly unconscious insolence tries my patience nearly beyond endurance; and again, because I have heard unfavourable reports of him. On the question of right which he disputes, I am perfectly informed. I am your tenant, my dear niece; when I am gone you will learn how *scrupulous* I have been; you will see how, under the pressure of the most agonizing pecuniary difficulties, the terrific penalty of a mis-spent youth, I have been careful never by a hair's breadth to transgress the strict line of my legal privileges; alike, as your tenant, Maud, and as your guardian; how, amid frightful agitations, I have kept myself, by the miraculous strength and grace vouchsafed me — *pure*."

"The world," he resumed after a short pause, "has no faith in any man's conversion; it never forgets what he was, it never believes him anything better, it is an inexorable and stupid judge. What I was I will describe in blacker terms, and with more heartfelt detestation than my traducers — a reckless prodigal, a godless profligate. Such I was; what I am, I am. If I had no hope beyond this world, of all men most miserable; but with that hope, a sinner saved."

Then he waxed eloquent and mystical. I think his Swedenborgian studies had crossed his notions of religion with strange lights. I never could follow him quite in these excursions into the region of symbolism. I only recollect that he talked of the deluge and the waters of Mara, and said, "I am washed — I am sprinkled," and then pausing, bathed his thin temples and forehead with eau de Cologne, a process which was, perhaps, suggested by his imagery of sprinkling and so forth.



Thus refreshed, he sighed and smiled, and passed to the subject of Doctor Bryerly.

"Of Doctor Bryerly I know that he is sly, that he loves money, was born poor, and makes nothing by his profession. But he possesses many thousand pounds, under my poor brother's will, of *your money*; and he has glided with, of course a modest *nolo episcopari*, into the acting trusteeship, with all its multitudinous opportunities, of your immense property. That is not doing so badly for a visionary Swedenborgian. Such a man *must* prosper. But if he expected to make money of me, he is disappointed. Money, however, he will make of his trusteeship, as you will see. It is a dangerous resolution. But if he will seek the life of Dives, the worst I wish him is to find the death of Lazarus. But whether, like Lazarus, he be borne of angels into Abraham's bosom, or, like the rich man, only dies and is buried, and *the rest*, neither living nor dying do I desire his company."

Uncle Silas here seemed suddenly overtaken by exhaustion. He leaned back with a ghastly look, and his lean features glistened with the dew of faintness. I screamed for Wyat. But he soon recovered sufficiently to smile his odd smile, and with it and his frown, nodded and waved me away.



## CHAPTER XIII.

## Question and Answer.

My uncle, after all, was not ill that day, after the strange fashion of his malady, be it what it might. Old Wyat repeated in her sour laconic way that there was "nothing to speak of amiss with him." But there remained with me a sense of pain and fear. Doctor Bryerly, notwithstanding my uncle's sarcastic reflections, remained, in my estimation, a true and wise friend. I had all my life been accustomed to rely upon others, and here, haunted by many unavowed and ill-defined alarms and doubts, the disappearance of an active and able friend caused my heart to sink.

Still there remained my dear Cousin Monica and my pleasant and trusted friend, Lord Ilbury; and in less than a week arrived an invitation from Lady Mary to the Grange, for me and Milly, to meet Lady Knollys. It was accompanied, she told me, by a note from Lord Ilbury to my uncle, supporting her request; and in the afternoon I received a message to attend my uncle in his room.

"An invitation from Lady Mary Carysbroke for you and Milly to meet Monica Knollys; have you received it?" asked my uncle, so soon as I was seated. Answered in the affirmative, he continued —

"Now, Maud Ruthyn, I expect the truth from you; I have been frank, so shall you. Have you ever heard me spoken ill of by Lady Knollys?"



I was quite taken aback.

I felt my cheeks flushing. I was returning his fierce cold gaze with a stupid stare, and remained dumb.

"Yes, Maud, you *have*."

I looked down in silence.

"I *know* it; but it is right you should answer; have you or have you not?"

I had to clear my voice twice or thrice. There was a kind of spasm in my throat.

"I am trying to recollect," I said at last.

"*Do* recollect," he replied imperiously.

There was a little interval of silence. I would have given the world to be, on any conditions, anywhere else in the world.

"Surely, Maud, you don't wish to deceive your guardian? Come, the question is a plain one, and I know the truth already. I ask you again — have you ever heard me spoken ill of by Lady Knollys?"

"Lady Knollys," I said, hardly articulately, "speaks very freely, and often half in jest; but," I continued, observing something menacing in his face, "I have heard her express disapprobation of some things you have done."

"Come, Maud," he continued, in a stern, though still a low key, "did she not insinuate that charge — then, I suppose, in a state of incubation, the other day presented here full-fledged, with beak and claws, by that scheming apothecary — the statement that I was defrauding you by cutting down timber upon the grounds?"

"She certainly did mention the circumstance; but she also argued that it might have been through ignorance of the extent of your rights."



"Come, come, Maud, you must not prevaricate, girl. I *will* have it. Does she not habitually speak disparagingly of me, in your presence, and *to* you. *Answer.*"

I hung my head.

"Yes or no?"

"Well, perhaps so — yes," I faltered, and burst into tears.

"There, don't cry; it may well shock you. Did she not, to your knowledge, say the same things in presence of my child Millicent? I know it, I repeat — there is no use in hesitating; and I command you to answer."

Sobbing, I told the truth.

"Now sit still, while I write my reply."

He wrote, with the scowl and smile so painful to witness, as he looked down upon the paper, and then he placed the note before me —

"Read that, my dear."

It began —

"MY DEAR LADY KNOLLYS,

"You have favoured me with a note, adding your request to that of Lord Ilbury, that I should permit my ward and my daughter to avail themselves of Lady Mary's invitation. Being perfectly cognizant of the ill-feeling you have always and unaccountably cherished toward me, and also of the terms in which you have had the delicacy and the conscience to speak of me before and to my child and my ward, I can only express my amazement at the modesty of your request, while peremptorily refusing it. And I shall conscientiously adopt effectual measures to prevent your ever



again having an opportunity of endeavouring to destroy my influence and authority over my ward or my child, by direct or insinuated slander.

“Your defamed and injured kinsman,

“SILAS RUTHYN.”

I was stunned; yet what could I plead against the blow that was to isolate me? I wept aloud, with my hands clasped, looking on the marble face of the old man.

Without seeming to hear, he folded and sealed his note, and then proceeded to answer Lord Ilbury.

When that note was written, he placed it likewise before me, and I read it also through. It simply referred him to Lady Knollys “for an explanation of the unhappy circumstances which compelled him to decline an invitation, which it would have made his niece and his daughter so happy to accept.”

“You see, my dear Maud, how frank I am with you,” he said, waving the open note, which I had just read, slightly before he folded it. “I think I may ask you to reciprocate my candour.”

Dismissed from this interview, I ran to Milly, who burst into tears from sheer disappointment, so we wept and wailed together. But in my grief I think there was more reason.

I sat down to the dismal task of writing to my dear Lady Knollys. I implored her to make her peace with my uncle. I told her how frank he had been with me; and how he had shown me his sad reply to her letter. I told her of the interview to which he had himself invited me with Dr. Bryerly; how little disturbed he was by the accusation — no sign of guilt;



quite the contrary, perfect confidence. I implored of her to think the best, and remembering my isolation, to accomplish a reconciliation with Uncle Silas. "Only think," I wrote, "I only nineteen, and two years of solitude before me. What a separation!" No broken merchant ever signed the schedule of his bankruptcy with a heavier heart than did I this letter.

The griefs of youth are like the wounds of the gods — there is an ichor which heals the scars from which it flows: and thus Milly and I consoled ourselves, and next day enjoyed our ramble, our talk and readings, with a wonderful resignation to the inevitable.

Milly and I stood in the relation of *Lord Duberly* to *Doctor Pangloss*. I was to mend her "cackleology," and the occupation amused us both. I think at the bottom of our submission to destiny lurked a hope that Uncle Silas, the inexorable, would relent, or that Cousin Monica, that siren, would win and melt him to her purpose.

Whatever comfort, however, I derived from the absence of Dudley was not to be of very long duration; for one morning, as I was amusing myself alone, with a piece of worsted work, thinking, and just at that moment not unpleasantly, of many things, my Cousin Dudley entered the room.

"Back again, like a bad halfpenny, ye see. And how a' ye bin ever since, lass? Purely, I warrant, be your looks. I'm jolly glad to see ye, I am; no cattle going like ye, Maud."

"I think I must ask you to let go my hand, as I can't continue my work," I said, very stiffly, hoping to chill his enthusiasm a little.



"Anything to pleasure ye, Maud, 'taint in my heart to refuse ye nout. I a' bin to Wolverhampton, lass — jolly row there — and run over to Leamington; a'most broke my neck, faith, wi' a borrowed horse arter the dogs; ye would na care, Maud, if I broke my neck, would ye? Well, 'appen, jest a little," he good-naturedly supplied, as I was silent.

"Little over a week since I left here, by George; and to me it's half the almanac like; can ye guess the reason, Maud?"

"Have you seen your sister, Milly, or your father, since your return?" I asked coldly.

"*They'll* keep, Maud, never mind 'em; it be you I want to see — it be you I wor thinkin' on a' the time. I tell ye, lass, I'm all'ays a thinkin' on ye."

"I think you ought to go and see your father; you have been away, you say, some time. I don't think it is respectful," I said, a little sharply.

"If ye bid me go I'd a'most go, but I could na quite; there's nout on earth I would na do for you, Maud, excep' leaving you."

"And that," I said, with a petulant flush, "is the only thing on earth I would ask you to do."

"Blessed if you baint a blushin', Maud," he drawled, with an odious grin.

His stupidity was proof against everything.

"It is *too* bad!" I muttered, with an indignant little pat of my foot and mimic stamp.

"Well, you lasses be queer cattle; ye're angry wi' me now, cos ye think I got into mischief — ye do, Maud; ye know't, ye buxom little fool, down there at



Wolverhampton; and jest for that ye're ready to turn me off again the minute I come back; 't isn't fair."

"I don't *understand* you, sir; and I *beg* that you'll leave me."

"Now, didn't I tell ye about leavin' ye, Maud; 'tis the only thing I can't compass for yer sake. I'm jest a child in yer hands, I am, ye know. I can lick a big fellah to pot as limp as a rag, by George!" — (his oaths were not really so mild) — "ye see summat o' that 'tother day. Well, don't be vexed, Maud; 'twas all along o' you; ye know, I wor a bit jealous, 'appen; but anyhow I can do it; and look at me here, jest a child, I say, in yer hands."

"I wish you'd go away. Have you nothing to do, and no one to see? Why *can't* you leave me alone, sir?"

"'Cos I can't, Maud, that's jest why; and I wonder, Maud, how can you be so ill-natured, when you see me like this; how can ye?"

"I wish Milly would come," said I, peevishly, looking toward the door.

"Well, I'll tell you how it is, Maud. I may as well have it out. I like you better than any lass that ever I saw, a deal; you're nicer by chalks; there's none like ye — there isn't; and I wish you'd have me. I ha'n't much tin — father's run through a deal, he's pretty well up a tree, ye know; but though I baint so rich as some folk, I'm a better man, 'appen; and if ye'd take a tidy lad, that likes ye awful, and 'id die for your sake, why here he is."

"What can you mean, sir?" I exclaimed, rising in indignant bewilderment.



"I mean, Maud, if ye'll marry me, you'll never ha' cause to complain; I'll never let ye want for nout, nor gie' ye a wry word."

"Actually a proposal!" I ejaculated, like a person speaking in a dream.

I stood with my hand on the back of a chair, staring at Dudley, and looking, I dare say, as stupefied as I felt.

"There's a good lass, ye would na deny me," said the odious creature, with one knee on the seat of the chair behind which I was standing, and attempting to place his arm lovingly round my neck.

This effectually roused me, and starting back, I stamped upon the ground with actual fury.

"What has there ever been, sir, in my conduct, words, or looks, to warrant this unparalleled audacity? But that you are as stupid as you are impertinent, brutal, and ugly, you must, long ago, sir, have seen how I dislike you. How dare you, sir? Don't presume to obstruct me; I'm going to my uncle."

I had never spoken so violently to mortal before.

He in turn looked a little confounded; and I passed his extended but motionless arm with a quick and angry step.

He followed me a pace or two, however, before I reached the door, looking horridly angry, but stopped, and only swore after me some of these "wry words," which I was never to have heard. I was myself, however, too much incensed, and moving at too rapid a pace to catch their import; and I had knocked at my uncle's door before I began to collect my thoughts.

"Come in," replied my uncle's voice, clear, thin, and peevish.



I entered and confronted him.

"Your son, sir, has insulted me."

He looked at me with a cold curiosity steadily for a few seconds, as I stood panting before him with flaming cheeks.

"Insulted you?" repeated he. "Egad, you surprise me!"

The ejaculation savoured of "the old man," to borrow his scriptural phrase, more than anything I had heard from him before.

"*How?*" he continued; "how has Dudley *insulted* you, my dear child? Come, you're excited; sit down; take time, and tell me all about it. I did not know that Dudley was here."

"I — he — it *is* an insult. He knew very well — he *must* know I dislike him; and he presumed to make a proposal of marriage to me."

"Oh — o — oh!" exclaimed my uncle, with a prolonged intonation, which plainly said, is that the mighty matter?

He looked at me as he leaned back with the same steady curiosity, this time smiling, which somehow frightened me, and his countenance looked to me wicked, like the face of a witch, with a guilt I could not understand.

"And that is the amount of your complaint. He made you a formal proposal of marriage!"

"Yes; he proposed for me."

As I cooled I began to feel just a very little disconcerted, and a suspicion was troubling me that possibly an indifferent person might think that, having no more to complain of, my language was perhaps a little



exaggerated, and my demeanour a little too tempestuous.

My uncle, I dare say, saw some symptoms of this misgiving, for, smiling still, he said—

“My dear Maud, however just, you appear to me a little cruel; you don't seem to remember how much you are yourself to blame; you have one faithful friend at least, whom I advise your consulting — I mean your looking-glass. The foolish fellow is young, quite ignorant in the world's ways. He is in love — desperately enamoured—

*‘Aimer c'est craindre, et craindre c'est souffrir.’*

And suffering prompts to desperate remedies. We must not be too hard on a rough but romantic young fool, who talks according to his folly and his pain.”



## CHAPTER XIV.

## An Apparition.

"BUT, after all," he suddenly resumed, as if a new thought had struck him, "is it quite such folly, after all? It really strikes me, dear Maud, that the subject may be worth a second thought. No, no, you won't refuse to hear me," he said, observing me on the point of protesting. "I am, of course, assuming that you are fancy free. I am assuming, too, that you don't care twopence about Dudley, and even that you fancy you dislike him. You know in that pleasant play, poor Sheridan — delightful fellow! — all our fine spirits are dead — he makes Mrs. Malaprop say there is nothing like beginning with a little aversion. Now, though in matrimony, of course, that is only a joke, yet in love, believe me, it is no such thing. His own marriage with Miss Ogle, I *know*, was a case in point. She expressed a positive horror of him at their first acquaintance; and yet, I believe, she would, a few months later, have died rather than not have married him."

I was again about to speak, but with a smile he beckoned me into silence.

"There are two or three points you must bear in mind. One of the happiest privileges of your fortune is that you may, without imprudence, marry simply for love. There are few men in England who could offer you an estate comparable with that you already pos-



sess; or, in fact, appreciably increase the splendour of your fortune. If, therefore, he were in all other respects eligible, I can't see that his poverty would be an objection to weigh for one moment. He is quite a rough diamond. He has been, like many young men of the highest rank, too much given up to athletic sports — to that society which constitutes the aristocracy of the ring and the turf, and all that kind of thing. You see, I am putting all the worst points first. But I have known so many young men in my day, after a mad-cap career of a few years among prize-fighters, wrestlers, and jockeys learning their slang and affecting their manners — take up and cultivate the graces and the decencies. There was poor dear Newgate, many degrees lower in that kind of frolic, who, when he grew tired of it, became one of the most elegant and accomplished men in the House of Peers. Poor Newgate, he's gone, too! I could reckon up fifty of my early friends who all began like Dudley, and all turned out, more or less, like Newgate."

At this moment came a knock at the door, and Dudley put in his head most inopportunistically for the vision of his future graces and accomplishments.

"My good fellow," said his father, with a sharp sort of playfulness, "I happen to be talking about my son, and should rather not be overheard; you will, therefore, choose another time for your visit."

Dudley hesitated gruffly at the door, but another look from his father dismissed him.

"And now, my dear, you are to remember that Dudley has fine qualities — the most affectionate son in his rough way that ever father was blessed with;



most admirable qualities — indomitable courage, and a high sense of honour; and lastly, that he has the Ruthyn blood — the purest blood, I maintain it, in England."

My uncle, as he said this, drew himself up a little, unconsciously, his thin hand laid lightly over his heart with a little patting motion, and his countenance looked so strangely dignified and melancholy, that in admiring contemplation of it I lost some sentences which followed next.

"Therefore, dear, naturally anxious that my boy should not be dismissed from home — as he must be, should you persevere in rejecting his suit — I beg that you will reserve your decision to this day fortnight, when I will with much pleasure hear what you may have to say on the subject. But till then, observe me, not a word."

That evening he and Dudley were closeted for a long time. I suspect that he lectured him on the psychology of ladies; for a bouquet was laid beside my plate every morning at breakfast, which it must have been troublesome to get, for the conservatory at Bartram was a desert. In a few days more an anonymous green parrot arrived, in a gilt cage, with a little note in a clerk's hand, addressed to "Miss Ruthyn (of Knowl), Bartram-Haugh," &c. It contained only "Directions for caring green parrot," at the close of which, *underlined*, the words appeared — "The bird's name is Maud."

The bouquets I invariably left on the tablecloth, where I found them — the bird I insisted on Milly's keeping as her property. During the intervening fortnight Dudley never appeared, as he used sometimes to



do before, at luncheon, nor looked in at the window as we were at breakfast. He contented himself with one day placing himself in my way in the hall in his shooting accoutrements, and, with a clumsy, shuffling kind of respect, and hat in hand, he said —

“I think, Miss, I must a spoke uncivil t’other day. I was so awful put about, and didn’t know no more nor a child what I was saying; and I wanted to tell ye I’m sorry for it, and I beg your pardon — very humble, I do.”

I did not know what to say. I therefore said nothing, but made a grave inclination, and passed on.

Two or three times Milly and I saw him at a little distance in our walks. He never attempted to join us. Once only he passed so near that some recognition was inevitable, and he stopped and in silence lifted his hat with an awkward respect. But although he did not approach us, he was ostentatious with a kind of telegraphic civility in the distance. He opened gates, he whistled his dogs to “heel,” he drove away cattle, and then himself withdrew. I really think he watched us occasionally to render these services, for in this distant way we encountered him decidedly oftener than we used to do before his flattering proposal of marriage.

You may be sure that we discussed, Milly and I, that occurrence pretty constantly in all sorts of moods. Limited as had been her experience of human society, she very clearly saw *now* how far below its presentable level was her hopeful brother.

The fortnight sped swiftly, as time always does when something we dislike and shrink from awaits us at its close. I never saw Uncle Silas during that



period. It may seem odd to those who merely read the report of our last interview, in which his manner had been more playful and his talk more trifling than in any other, that from it I had carried away a profounder sense of fear and insecurity than from any other. It was with a foreboding of evil and an awful dejection that on a very dark day, in Milly's room, I awaited the summons which I was sure would reach me from my punctual guardian.

As I looked from the window upon the slanting rain and leaden sky, and thought of the hated interview that awaited me, I pressed my hand to my troubled heart, and murmured, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! then would I flee away, and be at rest."

Just then the prattle of the parrot struck my ear. I looked round on the wire cage, and remembered the words, "The bird's name is Maud."

"Poor bird!" I said. "I dare say, Milly, it longs to get out. If it were a native of this country, would not you like to open the window and then the door of that cruel cage, and let the poor thing fly away?"

"Master wants Miss Maud," said Wyat's disagreeable tones, at the half-open door.

I followed in silence, with the pressure of a near alarm at my heart, like a person going to an operation.

When I entered the room my heart beat so fast that I could hardly speak. The tall form of Uncle Silas rose before me, and I made him a faltering reverence.

He darted from under his brows a wild, fierce glance at old Wyat, and pointed to the door imperiously with his skeleton finger. The door shut, and we were alone.



"A chair?" he said, pointing to a seat.

"Thank you, uncle, I prefer standing," I faltered.

He also stood — his white head bowed forward, the phosphoric glare of his strange eyes shone upon me from under his brows — his finger-nails just rested on the table.

"You saw the luggage corded and addressed, as it stands ready for removal in the hall?" he asked.

I had. Milly and I had read the cards which dangled from the trunk-handles and gun-case. The address was — "Mr. Dudley R. Ruthyn, Paris, *viâ* Dover."

"I am old — agitated — on the eve of a decision on which much depends. Pray relieve my suspense. Is my son to leave Bartram to-day in sorrow, or to remain in joy? Pray answer quickly."

I stammered I know not what. I was incoherent — wild, perhaps; but somehow I expressed my meaning — my unalterable decision. I thought his lips grew whiter and his eyes shone brighter as I spoke.

When I had quite made an end he heaved a great sigh, and turning his eyes slowly to the right and the left, like a man in a helpless distraction, he whispered —

"God's will be done."

I thought he was upon the point of fainting — a clay tint darkened the white of his face; and seeming to forget my presence, he sat down, looking with a despairing scowl on his ashy, old hand, as it lay upon the table.

I stood gazing at him, feeling almost as if I had murdered the old man — he still gazing askance, with an imbecile scowl, upon his hand.



"Shall I go, Sir?" I at length found courage to whisper.

"Go?" he said, looking up suddenly; and it seemed to me as if a stream of cold sheet lightning had crossed and enveloped me for a moment.

"Go? — oh! — a — yes — *yes*, Maud — go. I must see poor Dudley before his departure," he added, as it were, in soliloquy.

Trembling lest he should revoke his permission to depart, I glided quickly and noiselessly from the room.

Old Wyat was prowling outside, with a cloth in her hand, pretending to dust the carved door-case. She frowned a stare of inquiry over her shrunken arm on me, as I passed. Milly, who had been on the watch, ran and met me. We heard my uncle's voice, as I shut the door, calling Dudley. He had been waiting probably in the adjoining room. I hurried into my chamber, with Milly at my side, and there my agitation found relief in tears, as that of girlhood naturally does.

A little while after we saw from the window Dudley, looking, I thought, very pale, get into a vehicle, on the top of which his luggage lay, and drive away from Bartram.

I began to take comfort. His departure was an inexpressible relief. His final departure! a distant journey!

We had tea in Milly's room that night. Firelight and candles are inspiring. In that red glow I always felt and feel more safe, as well as more comfortable, than in the daylight — quite irrationally, for we know the night is the appointed day of such as love the darkness better than light, and evil walks thereby.



But so it is. Perhaps the very consciousness of external danger enhances the enjoyment of the well-lighted interior, just as the storm does that roars and hurtles over the roof.

While Milly and I were talking, very cosily, a knock came to the room door, and without waiting for an invitation to enter, old Wyat came in, and glowering at us, with her brown claw upon the door-handle, she said to Milly —

“Ye must leave your funnin’, Miss Milly, and take your turn in your father’s room.”

“Is he ill?” I asked.

She answered, addressing not me, but Milly —

“A wrought two hours in a fit arter Master Dudley went. ’Twill be the death o’ him, I’m thinkin’, poor old fellah. I wor sorry myself when I saw Master Dudley a going off in the moist to-day, poor fellah. There’s trouble enough in the family without a’ that; but ’twont be a family long, I’m thinkin’. Nout but trouble, nout but trouble, since late changes came.”

Judging by the sour glance she threw on me as she said this, I concluded that I represented those “late changes” to which all the sorrows of the house were referred.

I felt unhappy under the ill-will even of this odious old woman, being one of those unhappily constructed mortals who cannot be indifferent when they reasonably ought, and always yearn after kindness, even that of the worthless.

“I must go. I wish you’d come wi’ me, Maud, I’m so afraid all alone,” said Milly, imploringly.

“Certainly, Milly,” I answered, not liking it, you may be sure; “you shan’t sit there alone.”



So together we went, old Wyat cautioning us for our lives to make no noise.

We passed through the old man's sitting-room, where that day had occurred his brief but momentous interview with me, and his parting with his only son, and entered the bed-room at the further end.

A low fire burned in the grate. The room was in a sort of twilight. A dim lamp near the foot of the bed at the further side, was the only light burning there. Old Wyat whispered an injunction not to speak above our breaths, nor to leave the fireside unless the sick man called or showed signs of weariness. These were the directions of the Doctor, who had been there.

So Milly and I sat ourselves down near the hearth, and old Wyat left us to our resources. We could hear the patient breathe; but he was quite still. In whispers we talked; but our conversation flagged. I was, after my wont, upbraiding myself for the suffering I had inflicted. After about half an hour's desultory whispering, and intervals, growing longer and longer, of silence, it was plain that Milly was falling asleep.

She strove against it, and I tried hard to keep her talking; but it would not do, sleep overcame her; and I was the only person in that ghastly room in a state of perfect consciousness.

There were associations connected with my last vigil there to make my situation very nervous and disagreeable. Had I not had so much to occupy my mind of a distinctly practical kind, Dudley's audacious suit, my uncle's questionable toleration of it, and my own conduct throughout that most disagreeable period of my existence, I should have felt my present situation a great deal more.



As it was, I thought of my real troubles, and something of Cousin Knollys, and, I confess, a good deal of Lord Ilbury. When looking towards the door I thought I saw a human face, about the most terrible my fancy could have called up, looking fixedly into the room. It was only a "three-quarter," and not the whole figure, the door hid that in a great measure, and I fancied I saw, too, a portion of the fingers. The face gazed toward the bed, and in the imperfect light looked like a livid mask, with chalky eyes.

I had so often been startled by similar apparitions formed by accidental lights and shadows disguising homely objects, that I stooped forward, expecting, though tremulously, to see this tremendous one in like manner dissolve itself into its harmless elements; and now, to my unspeakable terror, I became perfectly certain that I saw the countenance of Madame de la Rougierre.

With a cry, I started back, and shook Milly furiously from her trance.

"Look! look!" I cried. But the apparition or illusion was gone.

I clung so fast to Milly's arm, cowering behind her, that she could not rise.

"Milly! Milly! Milly! Milly!" I went on crying, like one struck with idiotcy, and unable to say anything else.

In a panic Milly, who had seen nothing, and could conjecture nothing of the cause of my terror, jumped up, and clinging to one another, we huddled together into the corner of the room, I still crying wildly, "Milly! Milly! *Milly!*" and nothing else.

"What is it — where is it — what do you see?" cried Milly, clinging to me as I did to her.



"It will come again; it will come; oh, heaven!"

"What — what is it, Maud?"

"The face! the face!" I cried. "Oh, Milly! Milly! Milly!"

We heard a step softly approaching the open door, and in a horrible *sauve qui peut*, we rushed and stumbled together toward the light by Uncle Silas's bed. But old Wyat's voice and figure reassured us.

"Milly," I said, so soon as, pale and very faint, I reached my apartment, "no power on earth shall ever tempt me to enter that room again after dark."

"Why, Maud, dear, what, in Heaven's name, did you see?" said Milly, scarcely less terrified.

"Oh, I can't; I can't; I *can't*, Milly. Never ask me. It is haunted. The room is haunted *horribly*."

"Was it Charke?" whispered Milly, looking over her shoulder, all aghast.

"No, no — don't ask me; a fiend in a worse shape." I was relieved at last by a long fit of weeping; and all night good Mary Quince sat by me, and Milly slept by my side. Starting and screaming, and drugged with sal-volatile, I got through that night of supernatural terror, and saw the blessed light of heaven again.

Doctor Jolks, when he came to see my uncle in the morning, visited me also. He pronounced me very hysterical, made minute inquiries respecting my hours and diet, asked what I had had for dinner yesterday. There was something a little comforting in his cool and confident pooh-poohing of the ghost theory. The result was a regimen which excluded tea, and imposed chocolate and porter, earlier hours, and I forget all beside; and he undertook to promise that, if I would but observe his directions, I should never see a ghost again.



## CHAPTER XV.

## Milly's Farewell.

A FEW days' time saw me much better. Doctor Jolks was so contemptuously sturdy and positive on the point that I began to have comfortable doubts about the reality of my ghost; and having still a horror indescribable of the illusion, if such it were, the room in which it appeared, and everything concerning it, I would neither speak, nor, so far as I could, think of it.

So, though Bartram-Haugh was gloomy as well as beautiful, and some of its associations awful, and the solitude that reigned there sometimes almost terrible, yet early hours, bracing exercise, and the fine air that predominates that region, soon restored my nerves to a healthier tone.

But it seemed to me that Bartram-Haugh was to be to me a vale of tears; or rather, in my sad pilgrimage, that valley of the shadow of death through which poor Christian fared alone and in the dark.

One day Milly ran into the parlour, pale, with wet cheeks, and, without saying a word, threw her arms about my neck, and burst into a paroxysm of weeping.

"What is it, Milly — what's the matter, dear — what is it?" I cried aghast; but returning her close embrace heartily.

"Oh! Maud — Maud darling, he's going to send me away."



"Away, dear! *where* away? And leave me alone in this dreadful solitude, where he knows I shall die of fear and grief without you? Oh! no — no, it *must* be a mistake."

"I'm going to France, Maud — I'm going away. Mrs. Jolks is going to London, day ar'ter to-morrow, and I'm to go wi' her; and an old French lady, he says, from the school will meet me there, and bring me the rest o' the way."

"Oh — ho — ho — ho — ho — o — o — o!" cried poor Milly, hugging me closer still, with her head buried in my shoulder, and swaying me about like a wrestler, in her agony.

"I never wor away from home afore, except that little bit wi' you over there at Elverston; and you wor wi' me then, Maud; an' I love ye — better than Bartram — better than a'; an' I think I'll die, Maud, if they take me away."

I was just as wild in my woe as poor Milly; and it was not until we had wept together for a full hour — sometimes standing — sometimes walking up and down the room — sometimes sitting and getting up in turns to fall on one another's necks — that Milly, plucking her handkerchief from her pocket, drew a note from it at the same time, which, as it fell upon the floor, she at once recollected to be one from Uncle Silas to me.

It was to this effect: —

"I wish to apprise my dear niece and ward of my plans. Milly proceeds to an admirable French school, as a pensionnaire, and leaves this on Thursday next. If after three months' trial she finds it in any way ob-



jectionable, she returns to us. If, on the contrary, she finds it in all respects the charming residence it has been represented to me, you, on the expiration of that period, join her there, until the temporary complication of my affairs shall have been so far adjusted as to enable me to receive you once more at Bartram. Hoping for happier days, and wishing to assure you that three months is the extreme limit of your separation from my poor Milly, I have written this, feeling, alas! unequal to seeing you at present.

“Bartram, Tuesday.

“P.S. — I can have no objection to your apprizing Monica Knollys of these arrangements. You will understand, of course, not a copy of this letter, but its substance.”

Over this document, scanning it as lawyers do a new Act of Parliament, we took comfort. After all, it was limited; a separation not to exceed three months, possibly much shorter. On the whole, too, I pleased myself with thinking Uncle Silas's note, though peremptory, was kind.

Our paroxysms subsided into sadness; a close correspondence was arranged. Something of the bustle and excitement of change supervened. If it turned out to be, in truth, a “charming residence,” how very delightful our meeting in France, with the interest of foreign scenery, ways, and faces, would be!

So Thursday arrived — a new gush of sorrow — a new brightening up — and, amid regrets and anticipations, we parted at the gate at the further end of the Windmill Wood. Then, of course, were more good-byes, more embraces, and tearful smiles. Good



Mrs. Jolks, who met us there, was in a huge fuss; I believe it was her first visit to the metropolis, and she was in proportion heated and important, and terrified about the train, so we had not many last words.

I watched poor Milly, whose head was stretched from the window, her hand waving many adieux, until the curve of the road, and the clump of old ash-trees, thick with ivy, hid Milly, carriage and all, from view. My eyes filled again with tears. I turned towards Bartram. At my side stood honest Mary Quince.

"Don't take on so, Miss; 'twont be no time passing; three months is nothing at all," she said, smiling kindly.

I smiled through my tears and kissed the good creature, and so side by side we re-entered the gate.

The lithe young man in fustian, whom I had seen talking with Beauty on the morning of our first encounter with that youthful Amazon, was awaiting our re-entrance with the key in his hand. He stood half behind the open wicket. One lean brown cheek, one shy eye, and his sharp upturned nose, I saw as we passed. He was treating me to a stealthy scrutiny, and seemed to shun my glance, for he shut the door quickly, and busied himself locking it, and then began stubbing up some thistles which grew close by, with the toe of his thick shoe, his back to us all the time.

It struck me that I recognised his features and I asked Mary Quince.

"Have you seen that young man before, Quince?"

"He brings up game for your uncle, sometimes, Miss, and lends a hand in the garden, I believe."

"Do you know his name, Mary?"



"They call him Tom; I don't know what more, Miss."

"Tom," I called; "please, Tom, come here for a moment."

Tom turned about, and approached slowly. He was more civil than the Bartram people usually were, for he plucked off his shapeless cap of rabbit-skin with a clownish respect.

"Tom, what is your other name; Tom *what*, my good man?" I asked.

"Tom Brice, ma'am."

"Haven't I seen you before, Tom Brice?" I pursued, for my curiosity was excited, and with it much graver feelings; for there certainly *was* a resemblance in Tom's features to those of the postilion who had looked so hard at me as I passed the carriage in the warren at Knowl, on the evening of the outrage which had scared that quiet place.

"'Appen you may have, ma'am," he answered, quite coolly, looking down the buttons of his gaiters.

"Are you a good whip — do you drive well?"

"I'll drive a plough wi' most lads hereabout," answered Tom.

"Have you ever been to Knowl, Tom?"

Tom gaped very innocently.

"Anan," he said.

"Here, Tom, is half-a-crown."

He took it readily enough.

"That be very good," said Tom, with a nod, having glanced sharply at the coin.

I can't say whether he applied that term to the coin, or to his luck, or to my generous self.

"Now, Tom, you'll tell me, have you ever been to Knowl?"



"Maught a' bin, ma'am, but I don't mind no sich place — no."

As Tom spoke this with great deliberation, like a man who loves truth, putting a strain upon his memory for its sake, he spun the silver coin two or three times into the air and caught it, staring at it the while, with all his might.

"Now, Tom, recollect yourself, and tell me the truth, and I'll be a friend to you. Did you ride postilion to a carriage having a lady in it, and I think several gentlemen, which came to the grounds of Knowl, when the party had their luncheon on the grass, and there was a — a quarrel with the gamekeepers? Try, Tom, to recollect; you shall, upon my honour, have no trouble about it, and I'll try to serve you."

Tom was silent, while with a vacant gape he watched the spin of his half-crown twice, and then catching it with a smack in his hand, which he thrust into his pocket, he said, still looking in the same direction —

"I never rid postilion in my days, ma'am. I know nout o' sich a place, though 'appen I maught a' bin there; Knowl, ye ca't. I was ne'er out o' Derbyshire but thrice to Warwick fair wi' horses be rail an twice to York."

"You're certain, Tom?"

"Sartin sure, ma'am."

And Tom made another loutish salute, and cut the conference short by turning off the path and beginning to hollo after some trespassing cattle.

I had not felt anything like so nearly sure in this essay at identification as I had in that of Dudley. Even of Dudley's identity with the Church Scarsdale man I



had daily grown less confident; and, indeed, had it been proposed to bring it to the test of a wager, I do not think I should, in the language of sporting gentlemen, have cared to "back" my original opinion. There was, however, a sufficient uncertainty to make me uncomfortable; and there was another uncertainty to enhance the unpleasant sense of ambiguity.

On our way back we passed the bleaching trunks and limbs of several ranks of barkless oaks lying side by side. Some squared by the hatchet, perhaps sold, for there were large letters and Roman numerals traced upon them in red chalk. I sighed as I passed them by, not because it was wrongfully done, for I really rather leaned to the belief that Uncle Silas was well advised in point of law. But alas! here lay low the grand old family decorations of Bartram-Haugh, not to be replaced for centuries to come, under whose spreading boughs the Ruthyns of three hundred years ago had hawked and hunted!

On the trunk of one of these I sat down to rest, Mary Quince meanwhile pattering about in unmeaning explorations. While thus listlessly seated, the girl, Meg Hawkes, walked by, carrying a basket.

"Hish!" she said quickly as she passed, without altering her pace or raising her eyes; "don't ye speak nor look — fayther spies us; I'll tell ye next turn."

"Next turn" — when was that? Well, she might be returning; and as she could not then say more than she had said, in merely passing without a pause, I concluded to wait for a short time and see what would come of it.

After a short time I looked about me a little, and I saw Dickon Hawkes — Pegtop, as poor Milly used



to call him — with an axe in his hand, prowling luridly among the timber.

Observing that I saw him, he touched his hat sulkily, and by-and-by passed me, muttering to himself. He plainly could not understand what business I could have in that particular part of the Windmill Wood, and let me see it in his countenance.

His daughter did pass me again; but this time he was near, and she was silent. Her next transit occurred as he was questioning Mary Quince at some little distance; and as she passed precisely in the same way, she said —

“Don’t you be alone wi’ Master Dudley nowhere for the world’s worth.”

The injunction was so startling that I was on the point of questioning the girl. But I recollected myself, and waited in the hope that in her future transits she might be more explicit. But one word more she did not utter, and the jealous eye of old Pegtop was so constantly upon us that I refrained.

There was vagueness and suggestion enough in the oracle to supply work for many an hour of anxious conjecture, and many a horrible vigil by night. Was I never to know peace at Bartram-Haugh?

Ten days of poor Milly’s absence, and of my solitude, had already passed, when my uncle sent for me to his room.

When old Wyat stood at the door, mumbling and snarling her message, my heart died within me.

It was late — just that hour when dejected people feel their anxieties most — when the cold gray of twilight has deepened to its darkest shade, and before



the cheerful candles are lighted, and the safe quiet of the night sets in.

When I entered my uncle's sitting-room — though his window-shutters were open and the wan streaks of sunset visible through them, like narrow lakes in the chasms of the dark western clouds — a pair of candles were burning; one stood upon the table by his desk, the other on the chimneypiece, before which his tall, thin figure stooped. His hand leaned on the mantelpiece, and the light from the candle just above his bowed head touched his silvery hair. He was looking, as it seemed, into the subsiding embers of the fire, and was a very statue of forsaken dejection and decay.

"Uncle!" I ventured to say, having stood for some time unperceived near his table.

"Ah, yes, Maud, my dear child — my *dear* child." He turned, and with the candle in his hand, smiling his silvery smile of suffering on me. He walked more feebly and stiffly, I thought, than I had ever seen him move before.

"Sit down, Maud — pray sit there."

I took the chair he indicated.

"In my misery and my solitude, Maud, I have invoked you like a spirit, and you appear."

With his two hands leaning on the table he looked across at me, in a stooping attitude; he had not seated himself. I continued silent until it should be his pleasure to question or address me.

At last he said, raising himself and looking upward, with a wild adoration — his finger tips elevated and glimmering in the faint mixed light —



"No, I thank my Creator, I am not quite forsaken."

Another silence, during which he looked stedfastly at me, and muttered, as if thinking aloud —

"My guardian angel! — my guardian angel! Maud, *you* have a heart." He addressed me suddenly —

"Listen, for a few moments, to the appeal of an old and broken-hearted man — your guardian — your uncle — your *suppliant*. I had resolved never to speak to you more on this subject. But I was wrong. It was pride that inspired me — mere pride."

I felt myself growing pale, and flushed by turns during the pause that followed.

"I'm very miserable — very nearly desperate. What remains for me — what remains? Fortune has done her worst — thrown in the dust, her wheels rolled over me; and the servile world, who follow her chariot like a mob, stamp upon the mangled wretch. All this had passed over me, and left me scarred and bloodless in this solitude. It was not my fault, Maud — I say it was no fault of mine; I have no remorse, though more regrets than I can count, and all scored with fire. As people passed by Bartram, and looked upon its neglected grounds and smokeless chimneys, they thought my plight, I dare say, about the worst a proud man could be reduced to. They could not imagine one half its misery. But this old hectic — this old epileptic — this old spectre of wrongs, calamities, and follies, had still one hope — my manly though untutored son — the last male scion of the Ruthyns. Maud, have I lost him? His fate — my fate — I may say *Milly's* fate; — we all await your sentence. He loves you, as none



but the very young can love. And that once only in a life. He loves you desperately — a most affectionate nature — a Ruthyn, the best blood in England — the last man of the race; and I — if I lose him I lose all; and you will see me in my coffin, Maud, before many months. I stand before you in the attitude of a suppliant — shall I kneel?”

His eyes were fixed on me with the light of despair, his knotted hands clasped, his whole figure bowed toward me. I was inexpressibly shocked and pained.

“Oh, uncle! uncle!” I cried, and from very excitement I burst into tears.

I saw that his eyes were fixed on me with a dismal scrutiny. I think he divined the nature of my agitation; but he determined, notwithstanding, to press me while my helpless agitation continued.

“You see my suspense — you see my miserable and frightful suspense. You are kind, Maud; you love your father’s memory; you pity your father’s brother; you would not say no, and place a pistol at his head?”

“Oh! I must — I must — I *must* say no. Oh! spare me, uncle, for Heaven’s sake. Don’t question me — don’t press me. I could not — I *could* not do what you ask.”

“I yield, Maud — I yield, my dear. I will *not* press you; you shall have time, your *own* time, to think. I will accept *no* answer now — no, *none*, Maud.”

He said this, raising his thin hand to silence me.

“There, Maud, enough. I have spoken, as I always do to you, frankly, perhaps too frankly; but



agony and despair will speak out, and plead, even with the most obdurate and cruel."

With these words Uncle Silas entered his bed-chamber, and shut the door, not violently, but with a resolute hand, and I thought I heard a cry.

I hastened to my own room. I threw myself on my knees, and thanked Heaven for the firmness vouchsafed me; I could not believe it to have been my own.

I was more miserable in consequence of this renewed suit on behalf of my odious cousin than I can describe. My uncle had taken such a line of importunity that it became a sort of agony to resist. I thought of the possibility of my hearing of his having made away with himself, and was every morning relieved when I heard that he was still as usual. I have often wondered since at my own firmness. In that dreadful interview with my uncle I had felt, in the whirl and horror of my mind, on the very point of submitting, just as nervous people are said to throw themselves over precipices through sheer dread of falling.



## CHAPTER XVI.

Sarah Matilda comes to Light.

SOME time after this interview, one day as I sat, sad enough, in my room, looking listlessly from the window, with good Mary Quince, whom, whether in the house or in my melancholy rambles, I always had by my side, I was startled by the sound of a loud and shrill female voice, in violent hysterical action, gabbling with great rapidity, sobbing, and very nearly screaming in a sort of fury.

I started up, staring at the door.

"Lord bless us!" cried honest Mary Quince, with round eyes and mouth agape, staring in the same direction.

"Mary — Mary, what can it be?"

"Are they beating some one down yonder? I don't know where it comes from," gasped Quince.

"I will — I will — I'll see her. It's her I want. Oo—hoo—hoo—hoo—oo—o— Miss Maud Ruthyn of Knowl. Miss Ruthyn of Knowl. Hoo—hoo—hoo—hoo—oo!"

"What on earth can it be?" I exclaimed, in great bewilderment and terror.

It was now plainly very near indeed, and I heard the voice of our mild and shaky old butler evidently remonstrating with the distressed damsel.

"I'll see her," she continued, pouring a torrent of vile abuse upon me, which stung me with a sudden



sense of anger. What had I done to be afraid of any one? How dared any one in my uncle's house — in *my* house — mix my name up with her detestable scurrilities?

"For Heaven's sake, Miss, don't ye go out," cried poor Quince; "it's some drunken creature."

But I was very angry, and, like a fool, as I was, I threw open the door, exclaiming in a loud and haughty key —

"Here is Miss Ruthyn of Knowl. Who wants to see her?"

A pink and white young lady, with black tresses, violent, weeping, shrill, voluble was flouncing up the last stair, and shook her dress out on the lobby; and poor old Giblets, as Milly used to call him, was following in her wake, with many small remonstrances and entreaties, perfectly unheeded.

The moment I looked at this person, it struck me that she was the identical lady whom I had seen in the carriage at Knowl Warren. The next moment I was in doubt; the next, still more so. She was decidedly thinner, and dressed by no means in such lady-like taste. Perhaps she was hardly like her at all. I began to distrust all these resemblances, and to fancy, with a shudder, that they originated, perhaps, only in my own sick brain.

On seeing me, this young lady — as it seemed to me, a good deal of the bar-maid or lady's-maid species — dried her eyes fiercely, and, with a flaming countenance, called upon me peremptorily to produce her "lawful husband." Her loud, insolent, outrageous attack had the effect of enhancing my indignation, and I quite forget what I said to her, but I well remember



that her manner became a good deal more decent. She was plainly under the impression that I wanted to appropriate her husband; or, at least, that he wanted to marry me; and she ran on at such a pace, and her harangue was so passionate, incoherent, and unintelligible, that I thought her out of her mind; she was far from it, however. I think if she had allowed me even a second for reflection, I should have hit upon her meaning. As it was, nothing could exceed my perplexity, until, plucking a soiled newspaper from her pocket, she indicated a particular paragraph, already sufficiently emphasized by double lines of red ink at its sides. It was a Lancashire paper, of about six weeks since, and very much worn and soiled for its age. I remember in particular a circular stain from the bottom of a vessel, either of coffee or brown stout. The paragraph was as follows, recording an event a year or more anterior to the date of the paper —

“MARRIAGE — on Tuesday, August 7, 18— at Leatherwig Church, by the Rev. Arthur Hughes, Dudley R. Ruthyn, Esq., only son and heir of Silas Ruthyn, Esq., of Bartram-Haugh, Derbyshire, to Sarah Matilda, second daughter of John Mangles, Esq., of Wiggan, in this county.”

At first I read nothing but amazement in this announcement, but in another moment I felt how completely I was relieved; and showing, I believe, my intense satisfaction in my countenance — for the young lady eyed me with considerable surprise and curiosity — I said —

“This is extremely important. You must see Mr. Silas Ruthyn this moment. I am certain he knows nothing of it. I will conduct you to him.”



"No more he does. I know that myself," she replied, following me with a self-asserting swagger, and a great rustling of cheap silk.

As we entered, Uncle Silas looked up from his sofa, and closed his *Revue des deux Mondes*.

"What is all this?" he inquired, drily.

"This lady has brought with her a newspaper containing an extraordinary statement which affects our family," I answered.

Uncle Silas raised himself, and looked with a hard, narrow scrutiny at the unknown young lady.

"A libel, I suppose, in the paper?" he said, extending his hand for it.

"No, uncle — no; only a marriage," I answered.

"Not Monica?" he said, as he took it. "Pah, it smells all over of tobacco and beer," he added, throwing a little eau de Cologne over it.

He raised it with a mixture of curiosity and disgust, saying again "pah," as he did so.

He read the paragraph, and as he did his face changed from white, all over, to lead colour. He raised his eyes, and looked steadily for some seconds at the young lady, who seemed a little awed by his strange presence.

"And you are, I suppose, the young lady, Sarah Matilda *née* Mangles, mentioned in this little paragraph?" he said, in a tone you would have called a sneer, were it not that it trembled.

Sarah Matilda assented.

"My son is, I dare say, within reach. It so happens that I wrote to arrest his journey, and summon him here, some days since — some days since — some days since," he repeated slowly, like a person



whose mind has wandered far away from the theme on which he is speaking.

He had rung his bell, and old Wyat, always hovering about his rooms, entered.

"I want my son, immediately. If not in the house, send Harry to the stables; if not there, let him be followed, instantly. Brice is an active fellow, and will know where to find him. If he is in Feltram, or at a distance, let Brice take a horse, and Master Dudley can ride it back. He must be here without the loss of one moment."

There intervened nearly a quarter of an hour, during which, whenever he recollected her, Uncle Silas treated the young lady with a hyper-refined and ceremonious politeness, which appeared to make her uneasy, and even a little shy, and certainly prevented a renewal of those lamentations and invectives which he had heard faintly from the stair-head.

But for the most part Uncle Silas seemed to forget us and his book, and all that surrounded him, lying back in the corner of his sofa, his chin upon his breast, and such a fearful shade and carving on his features as made me prefer looking in any direction but his.

At length we heard the tread of Dudley's thick boots on the oak boards, and faint and muffled the sound of his voice as he cross-examined old Wyat before entering the chamber of audience.

I think he suspected quite another visitor, and had no expectation of seeing the particular young lady, who rose from her chair as he entered, in an opportune flood of tears, crying —

"Oh, Dudley, Dudley! — oh, Dudley, could you?"



Oh, Dudley, your own poor Sal! You could not — you would not — your lawful wife!”

This and a good deal more, with cheeks that streamed like a window-pane in a thunder shower, spoke Sarah Matilda with all her oratory, working his arm, which she clung to, up and down all the time, like the handle of a pump. But Dudley was, manifestly, confounded and dumb-founded. He stood for a long time gaping at his father, and stole just one sheepish glance at me; and, with red face and forehead, looked down at his boots, and then again at his father, who remained just in the attitude I have described, and with the same forbidding and dreary intensity in his strange face.

Like a quarrelsome man, worried in his sleep by a noise, Dudley suddenly woke up, as it were, with a start, in a half-suppressed exasperation, and shook her off with a jerk and a muttered curse, as she whisked involuntarily into a chair, with more violence than can have been pleasant.

“Judging by your looks and demeanour, Sir, I can almost anticipate your answers,” said my uncle, addressing him suddenly. “Will you be good enough — pray, madame, (parenthetically to our visitor,) command yourself for a few moments. Is this young person the daughter of a Mr. Mangles, and is her name Sarah Matilda?”

“I dessay,” answered Dudley, hurriedly.

“Is she your wife?”

“Is she my wife?” repeated Dudley, ill at ease.

“Yes, Sir; it is a plain question.”

All this time Sarah Matilda was perpetually



breaking into talk, and with difficulty silenced by my uncle.

"Well, 'appen she says I am — does she?" replied Dudley.

"Is she your wife, Sir?"

"Mayhap she so considers it, after a fashion," he replied, with an impudent swagger, seating himself as he did so.

"What do *you* think, Sir?" persisted Uncle Silas.

"I don't think nout about it," replied Dudley, surlily.

"Is that account true?" said my uncle, handing him the paper.

"They wishes us to believe so, at any rate."

"Answer directly, Sir. We have our thoughts upon it. If it be true, it is capable of *every* proof. For expedition's sake I ask you. There is no use in prevaricating."

"Who wants to deny it? It *is* true — there!"

"*There!* I knew he would," screamed the young woman, hysterically, with a laugh of strange joy.

"Shut up, will ye?" growled Dudley, savagely.

"Oh, Dudley, Dudley, darling! what have I done?"

"Bin and ruined me, jest — that's all."

"Oh! no, no, no, Dudley. Ye know I wouldn't. I could not — *could* not hurt ye, Dudley. No, no, no!"

He grinned at her, and, with a sharp side-nod, said —

"Wait a bit."

"Oh, Dudley, don't be vexed, dear. I did not mean it. I would not hurt ye for all the world. Never."

"Well, never mind. You and yours tricked me finely; and now you've got me — that's all."

My uncle laughed a very odd laugh.

"I knew it, of course; and upon my word, madam,



you and he make a very pretty couple," sneered Uncle Silas.

Dudley made no answer, looking, however, very savage.

And with this poor young wife, so recently wedded, the low villain had actually solicited me to marry him!

I am quite certain that my uncle was as entirely ignorant as I of Dudley's connexion, and had, therefore, no participation in this appalling wickedness.

"And I have to congratulate you, my good fellow, on having secured the affections of a very suitable and vulgar young woman."

"I baint the first o' the family as a' done the same," retorted Dudley.

At this taunt the old man's fury for a moment overpowered him. In an instant he was on his feet, quivering from head to foot. I never saw such a countenance — like one of those demon-grotesques we see in the Gothic side-aisles and groinings — a dreadful grimace, monkey-like and insane — and his thin hand caught up his ebony stick, and shook it paralytically in the air.

"If ye touch me wi' that, I'll smash ye, by —!" shouted Dudley, furious, raising his hands and hitching his shoulder, just as I had seen him when he fought Captain Oakley.

For a moment this picture was suspended before me, and I screamed, I know not what, in my terror. But the old man, the veteran of many a scene of excitement, where men disguise their ferocity in calm tones, and varnish their fury with smiles, had not quite lost his self-command. He turned toward me and said —



"Does he know what he's saying?"

And with an icy laugh of contempt, his high, thin, forehead still flushed, he sat down trembling.

"If you want to say aught, I'll hear ye. Ye may jaw me all ye like, and I'll stan' it."

"Oh, I may speak? Thank you," sneered Uncle Silas, glancing slowly round at me, and breaking into a cold laugh.

"Ay, I don't mind cheek, not I; but you must not go for to do that, ye know. Gammon. I won't stand a blow — I won't fro *no* one."

"Well, Sir, availing myself of your permission to speak, I may remark, without offence to the young lady, that I don't happen to recollect the name Mangles among the old families of England. I presume you have chosen her chiefly for her virtues and her graces."

Mrs. Sarah Matilda, not apprehending this compliment quite as Uncle Silas meant it, dropped a courtesy, notwithstanding her agitation, and, wiping her eyes, said, with a blubbered smile —

"You're very kind, sure."

"I hope, for both your sakes, she has got a little money. I don't see how you are to live else. You're too lazy for a gamekeeper; and I don't think you could keep a pot-house, you are so addicted to drinking and quarrelling. The only thing I am quite clear upon is, that you and your wife must find some other abode than this. You shall depart this evening; and now, Mr. and Mrs. Dudley Ruthyn, you may quit this room, if you please."

Uncle Silas had risen, and made them one of his old courtly bows, smiling a death-like sneer, and pointing to the door with his trembling fingers.



"Come, will ye?" said Dudley, grinding his teeth. "You're pretty well done here."

Not half understanding the situation, but looking woefully bewildered, she dropped a farewell courtesy at the door.

"Will ye *cut*?" barked Dudley, in a tone that made her jump; and suddenly, without looking about, he strode after her from the room.

"Maud, how shall I recover this? The vulgar *villain* — the *fool*! What an abyss were we approaching! and for me the last hope gone — and for me utter, utter, irretrievable ruin."

He was passing his fingers tremulously back and forward along the top of the mantelpiece, like a man in search of something, and continued so, looking along it, feebly and vacantly, although there was nothing there.

"I wish, uncle — you do not know how much I wish — I could be of any use to you. Maybe I can?"

He turned and looked at me sharply.

"Maybe you can," he echoed slowly. "Yes, maybe you can," he repeated more briskly. "Let us — let us see — let us think — that d— fellow! — my head!"

"You're not well, uncle?"

"Oh! yes, very well. We'll talk in the evening — I'll send for you."

I found Wyat in the next room, and told her to hasten, as I thought he was ill. I hope it was not very selfish, but such had grown to be my horror of seeing him in one of his strange seizures, that I hastened from the room precipitately — partly to escape the risk of being asked to remain.

The walls of Bartram House are thick, and the



recess at the doorway deep. As I closed my uncle's door I heard Dudley's voice on the stairs. I did not wish to be seen by him or by his "lady," as his poor wife called herself, who was engaged in vehement dialogue with him as I emerged, and not caring either to re-enter my uncle's room, I remained quietly ensconced within the heavy door-case, in which position I overheard Dudley say with a savage snarl —

"You'll jest go back the way ye came. I'm not goin' wi ye, if that's what ye be drivin' at — dang your impitins!"

"Oh! Dudley, dear, *what* have I done — what *have* I done — ye hate me so?"

"What a' ye done? ye vicious little beast, ye! You've got us turned out an' disinherited wi' yer d—d bosh, that's all; don't ye think it's enough?"

I could only hear her sobs and shrill tones in reply, for they were descending the stairs; and Mary Quince reported to me, in a horrified sort of way, that she saw him bundle her into the fly at the door, like a truss of hay into a hay-loft. And he stood with his head in at the window, scolding her, till it drove away.

"I knew he wor jawing her, poor thing! by the way be kep' waggin' his head — an' he had his fist inside, a shakin' in her face. I'm sure he looked wicked enough for anything; an' she a crying like a babby, an' lookin' back, an' wavin' her wet hankicher to him — poor thing! and she so young! 'Tis a pity. Dear me! I often think, Miss, 'tis well for me I never was married. And see how we all would like to get husbands for all that, though so few is happy together. 'Tis a queer world, and them that's single is maybe the best off after all."



## CHAPTER XVII.

## The Picture of a Wolf.

I WENT down that evening to the sitting-room which had been assigned to Milly and me, in search of a book — my good Mary Quince always attending me. The door was a little open, and I was startled by the light of a candle proceeding from the fireside, together with a considerable aroma of tobacco and brandy.

On my little work-table, which he had drawn beside the hearth, lay Dudley's pipe, his brandy-flask, and an empty tumbler; and he was sitting with one foot on the fender, his elbow on his knee, and his head resting in his hand, weeping. His back being a little toward the door, he did not perceive us; and we saw him rub his knuckles in his eyes, and heard the sounds of his selfish lamentation.

Mary and I stole away quietly, leaving him in possession, wondering when he was to leave the house, according to the sentence which I had heard pronounced upon him.

I was delighted to see old "Giblets" quietly strapping his luggage in the hall, and heard from him in a whisper that he was to leave that evening by rail — he did not know whither.

About half an hour afterwards Mary Quince, going out to reconnoitre, heard from old Wyat in the lobby that he had just started to meet the train.



Blessed be heaven for that deliverance! An evil spirit had been cast out, and the house looked lighter and happier. It was not until I sat down in the quiet of my room that the scenes and images of that agitating day began to move before my memory in orderly procession, and for the first time I appreciated, with a stunning sense of horror and a perfect rapture of thanksgiving, the value of my escape and the immensity of the danger which had threatened me. It may have been miserable weakness — I think it was. But I was young, nervous, and afflicted with a troublesome sort of conscience, which occasionally went mad, and insisted, in small things as well as great, upon sacrifices which my reason now assures me were absurd. Of Dudley I had a perfect horror; and yet had that system of solicitation, that dreadful and direct appeal to my compassion, that placing of my feeble girlhood in the seat of the arbiter of my aged uncle's hope or despair, been long persisted in, my resistance might have been worn out — who can tell? — and I self-sacrificed! Just as criminals in former times were teased, and watched, and cross-examined, year after year, incessantly, into a sort of madness; and worn out with the suspense, the iteration, the self-restraint, and insupportable fatigue, they at last cut all short, accused themselves, and went infinitely relieved to the scaffold — you may guess, then, for me, nervous, self-diffident, and alone, how intense was the comfort of knowing that Dudley was actually married, and the harrowing importunity which had just commenced for ever silenced.

That night I saw my uncle. I pitied him though I feared him. I was longing to tell him how anxious I was to help him, if only he could point out the way.



It was in substance what I had already said, but now strongly urged. He brightened; he sat up perpendicularly in his chair with a countenance, not weak or fatuous now, but resolute and searching, and which contracted into dark thought or calculation as I talked.

I dare say I spoke confusedly enough. I was always nervous in his presence; there was, I fancy, something mesmeric in the odd sort of influence which, without effort, he exercised over my imagination.

Sometimes this grew into a dismal panic, and Uncle Silas — polished, mild — seemed unaccountably horrible to me. Then it was no longer an accidental fascination of electro-biology. It was something more. His nature was incomprehensible by me. He was without the nobleness, without the freshness, without the softness, without the frivolities of such human nature as I had experienced, either within myself or in other persons. I instinctively felt that appeals to sympathies or feelings could no more affect him than a marble monument. He seemed to accommodate his conversation to the moral structure of others, just as spirits are said to assume the shape of mortals. There were the sensualities of the gourmet for his body, and there ended his human nature, as it seemed to me. Through that semi-transparent structure I thought I could now and then discern the light or the glare of his inner life. But I understood it not.

He never scoffed at what was good or noble — his hardest critic could not nail him to one such sentence; and yet, it seemed somehow to me, that his unknown nature was a systematic blasphemy against it all. If fiend he was, he was yet something higher than the garrulous, and withal feeble, demon of Goethe. He



assumed the limbs and features of our mortal nature. He shrouded his own, and was a profoundly reticent Mephistopheles. Gentle he had been to me — kindly he had nearly always spoken; but it seemed like the mild talk of one of those goblins of the desert, whom Asiatic superstition tells of, who appear in friendly shapes to stragglers from the caravan, beckon to them from afar, call them by their names, and lead them where they are found no more. Was, then, all his kindness but a phosphoric radiance covering something colder and more awful than the grave?

"It is very noble of you, Maud — it is angelic; your sympathy with a ruined and despairing old man. But I fear you will recoil. I tell you frankly that less than twenty thousand pounds will not extricate me from the quag of ruin in which I am entangled — lost."

"Recoil! Far from it. I'll do it. There must be some way."

"Enough, my fair young protectress — celestial enthusiast, enough. Though you do not, yet I recoil. I could not bring myself to accept this sacrifice. What signifies, even to me, my extrication. I lie a mangled wretch, with fifty mortal wounds on my crown; what avails the healing of one wound, when there are so many beyond all cure? Better to let me perish where I fall; and reserve your money for the worthier objects whom, perhaps, hereafter it may avail to save."

"But I *will* do this. I must. I cannot see you suffer with the power in my hands unemployed to help you," I exclaimed.

"Enough, dear Maud; the will is here — enough: there is balm in your compassion and good-will,



Leave me, ministering angel, for the present I cannot. If you *will*, we can talk of it again. Good-night."

And so we parted.

The attorney from Feltram, I afterwards heard, was with him nearly all that night, trying in vain to devise by their joint ingenuity any means by which I might tie myself up. But there were none. I could not bind myself.

I was myself full of the hope of helping him. What was this sum to me, great as it seemed? Truly nothing. I could have spared it, and never felt the loss.

I took up a large quarto with coloured prints, one of the few books I had brought with me from dear old Knowl. Too much excited to hope for sleep in bed, I opened it, and turned over the leaves, my mind still full of Uncle Silas and the sum I hoped to help him with.

Unaccountably one of those coloured engravings arrested my attention. It represented the solemn solitude of a lofty forest, a girl, in Swiss costume, was flying in terror, and as she fled flinging a piece of meat behind her which she had taken from a little market-basket hanging upon her arm. Through the glade a pack of wolves were pursuing her.

The narrative told, that on her return homeward with her marketing, she had been chased by wolves, and barely escaped by flying at her utmost speed, from time to time retarding, as she did so, the pursuit, by throwing, piece by piece, the contents of her basket, in her wake, to be devoured and fought for by the famished beasts of prey.

This print had seized my imagination. I looked



with a curious interest on the print: something in the disposition of the trees, their great height, and rude boughs, interlacing, and the awful shadow beneath, reminded me of a portion of the Windmill Wood where Milly and I had often rambled. Then I looked at the figure of the poor girl, flying for her life, and glancing terrified over her shoulder. Then I gazed on the gaping, murderous pack, and the hoary brute that led the van, and then I leaned back in my chair, and I thought — perhaps some latent association suggested what seemed a thing so unlikely — of a fine print in my portfolio from Vandyke's noble picture of Belisarius. Idly I traced with my pencil, as I leaned back, on an envelope that lay upon the table, this little inscription. It was mere fiddling; and, absurd as it looked, there was nothing but an honest meaning in it: — “£20,000. Date Obolum Belisario!” My dear father had translated the little Latin inscription for me, and I had written it down as a sort of exercise of memory; and also, perhaps, as expressive of that sort of compassion which my uncle's fall and miserable fate excited invariably in me. So I threw this queer little memorandum upon the open leaf of the book, and again the flight, the pursuit, and the bait to stay it, engaged my eye. And I heard a voice near the hearth-stone, as I thought, say, in a stern whisper, “Fly the fangs of Belisarius!”

“What's that?” said I, turning sharply to Mary Quince.

Mary rose from her work at the fireside, staring at me with that odd sort of frown that accompanies fear and curiosity.

“You spoke? Did you speak?” I said, catching her by the arm, very much frightened myself.



"No, Miss; no, dear!" answered she, plainly, thinking that I was a little wrong in my head.

There could be no doubt it was a trick of the imagination, and yet to this hour I could recognise that clear stern voice among a thousand, were it to speak again.

Jaded after a night of broken sleep and much agitation I was summoned next morning to my uncle's room.

He received me *oddly*, I thought. His manner seemed changed, and made an uncomfortable impression upon me. He was gentle, kind, smiling, submissive, as usual; but it seemed to me that he experienced henceforth toward me the same half-superstitious repulsion which I had always felt from him. Dream, or voice, or vision — which had done it? There seemed to be an unconscious antipathy and fear. When he thought I was not looking, his eyes were sometimes grimly fixed for a moment upon me. When I looked at him, his eyes were upon the book before him; and when he spoke a person not heeding what he uttered would have fancied that he was reading aloud from it.

There was nothing tangible but this shrinking from the encounter of our eyes. I said he was kind as usual. He was even more so. But there was this new sign of our silently repellent natures. Dislike it could not be. He knew I longed to serve him. Was it shame? Was there not a shade of horror in it?

"I have not slept," said he. "For me the night has passed in thought, and the fruit of it is this — I *cannot*, Maud, accept your noble offer."

"I am *very* sorry," exclaimed I, in all honesty.

"I know it, my dear niece, and appreciate your



goodness; but there are many reasons — none of them, I trust — ignoble, and which together render it impossible. No. It would be misunderstood — my honour shall not be impugned.”

“But, Sir, that could not be; you have never proposed it. It would be all, from first to last, *my* doing.”

“True, dear Maud, but I know, alas! more of this evil and slanderous world than your happy inexperience can do. Who will receive our testimony? None — no, not one. The difficulty — the insuperable moral difficulty is this — that I should expose myself to the plausible imputation of having worked upon you, unduly, for this end; and more, that I could not hold myself quite free from blame. It is your voluntary goodness, Maud. But you are young, inexperienced; and it is, I hold it, my duty to stand between you and any dealing with your property at so unripe an age. Some people may call this Quixotic. In my mind it is an imperious mandate of conscience; and I peremptorily refuse to disobey it, although within three weeks an execution will be in this house!”

I did not quite know what an execution meant; but from two harrowing novels, with whose distresses I was familiar, I knew that it indicated some direful process of legal torture and spoliation.

“Oh, uncle! — oh, Sir! — you cannot allow this to happen. What will people say of me? And — and there is poor Milly — and *everything*! Think what it will be.”

“It cannot be helped — *you* cannot help it, Maud. Listen to me. There will be an execution here, I cannot say exactly how soon; but I think in little more than a fortnight. I must provide for your comfort. You must leave. I have arranged that you shall join



Milly, for the present, in France, till I have time to look about me. You had better, I think, write to your cousin, Lady Knollys. She, with all her oddities, has a heart. Can you say, Maud, that I have been kind?"

"You have never been anything but kind," I exclaimed.

"That I've been self-denying when you made me a generous offer?" he continued. "That I now act to spare you pain? You may tell her, not as a message from me, but as a fact, that I am seriously thinking of vacating my guardianship — that I feel I have done her an injustice, and that, so soon as my mind is a little less tortured, I shall endeavour to effect a reconciliation with her, and would wish ultimately to transfer the care of your person and education to *her*. You may say I have no longer an interest even in vindicating my name. My son has wrecked himself by a marriage. I forgot to tell you he stopped at Feltram, and this morning wrote to pray a parting interview. If I grant it, it shall be the last. I shall never see him or correspond with him more."

The old man seemed much overcome, and held his handkerchief to his eyes.

"He and his wife are, I understand, about to emigrate; the sooner the better," he resumed bitterly. "Deeply, Maud, I regret having tolerated his suit to you, even for a moment. Had I thought it over, as I did the whole case last night, nothing could have induced me to permit it. But I have lived for so long like a monk in his cell, my wants and observation limited to the narrow compass of this chamber, that my knowledge of the world has died out with my youth and my hopes: and I did not, as I ought to



have done, consider many objections. Therefore, dear Maud, on this one subject, I entreat, be silent; its discussion can effect nothing now. I was wrong, and frankly ask you to forget my mistake."

I had been on the point of writing to Lady Knollys on this odious subject, when, happily, it was set at rest, by the disclosure of yesterday; and, being so, I could have no difficulty in acceding to my uncle's request. He was conceding so much that I could not withhold so trifling a concession in return.

"I hope Monica will continue to be kind to poor Milly after I am gone."

Here there were a few seconds of meditation.

"Maud, you will not, I think, refuse to convey the substance of what I have just said in a letter to Lady Knollys, and perhaps you would have no objection to let me see it when it is written. It will prevent the possibility of its containing any misconception of what I have just spoken; and, Maud, you won't forget to say whether I have been kind. It would be a satisfaction to me to know that Monica was assured that I never either teased or bullied my young ward."

With these words he dismissed me; and forthwith I completed such a letter as would quite embody what he had said; and in my own glowing terms, being in high good-humour with Uncle Silas, recorded my estimate of his gentleness and good-nature; and when I submitted it to him he expressed his admiration of what he was pleased to call my cleverness in so exactly conveying what he wished, and his gratitude for the handsome terms in which I had spoken of my old guardian.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

## An Odd Proposal.

As I and Mary Quince returned from our walk that day, and had entered the hall, I was surprised most disagreeably, by Dudley's emerging from the vestibule at the foot of the great staircase. He was, I suppose, in his travelling costume — a rather soiled white surtout, a great coloured muffler in folds about his throat, his "chimney-pot" on, and his fur cap sticking out from his pocket. He had just descended, I suppose, from my uncle's room. On seeing me he stepped back, and stood with his shoulders to the wall, like a mummy in a museum.

I pretended to have a few words to say to Mary before leaving the hall, in the hope that, as he seemed to wish to escape me, he would take the opportunity of getting quickly off the scene.

But he had changed his mind, it would seem, in the interval; for when I glanced in that direction again he had moved toward us, and stood in the hall with his hat in his hand. I must do him the justice to say he looked horribly dismal, sulky, and frightened.

"Ye'll gie me a word, Miss — only a thing I ought to say — for your good; by — —, mind, it's for *your* good, Miss."

Dudley stood a little way off, viewing me, with his hat in both hands and a "glooming" countenance.

I detested the idea of either hearing or speaking



to him; but I had not resolution to refuse, and only saying "I can't imagine what you can wish to speak to me about," I approached him. "Wait there at the banister, Quince."

There was a fragrance of alcohol about the flushed face and gaudy muffler of this odious cousin, which heightened the effect of his horribly dismal features. He was speaking, besides, a little thickly; but his manner was dejected, and he was treating me with an elaborate and discomfited respect which reassured me.

"I'm a bit up a tree, Miss," he said, shuffling his feet on the oak floor. "I behaved a d—— fool; but I baint one o' they sort. I'm a fellah as 'ill fight his man, an' stan' up to 'm fair, don't ye see? An' I *baint* one o' they sort — no, *dang* it, I baint."

Dudley delivered his puzzling harangue with a good deal of undertoned vehemence, and was strangely agitated. He, too, had got an unpleasant way of avoiding my eye, and glancing along the floor from corner to corner as he spoke, which gave him a very hang-dog air.

He was twisting his fingers in his great sandy whisker, and pulling it roughly enough to drag his cheek about by that savage purchase; and with his other hand he was crushing and rubbing his hat against his knee.

"The old boy above there be half crazed, I think; he don't mean half as he says thof, not he. But I'm in a bad fix anyhow — a regular sell it's been, and I can't get a tizzy out of him. So, ye see, I'm up a tree, Miss; and he sich a one, he'll make it a wuss mull if I let him. He's as sharp wi' me as one o' them lawyer chaps, *dang* 'em, and he's a lot of I O's and



rubbitch o' mine; and Bryerly writes to me he can't gie me my legacy, 'cause he's got a notice from Archer and Sleigh a warnin' him not to gie me as much as a bob; for I signed it away to governor, he says — which I believe's a lie. I may a' signed some writing — 'appen I did — when I was a bit cut one night. But that's no way to catch a gentleman, and 'twon't stand. There's justice to be had, and 'twon't *stand*, I say; and I'm not in 's hands that way. Thof I may be a bit up the spout, too, I don't deny; only I baint a-goin' the whole hog all at once. I'm none o' they sort. He'll find I baint."

Here Mary Quince coughed demurely from the foot of the stair to remind me that the conversation was protracted.

"I don't very well understand," I said, gravely; "and I am now going up-stairs."

"Don't, jest a minute, Miss; it's only a word, ye see. We'll be goin' t' Australia, Sary Mangles an' me, aboard the *Seamew*, on the 5th. I'm for Liverpool to-night, and she'll meet me there, an' — an', please God Almighty, ye'll never see me more; an' I'd rather gie ye a lift, Maud, before I go; an' I tell ye what, if ye'll just gie me your written promise ye'll gie me that twenty thousand ye were offering to gie the Governor, I'll take ye cleverly out o' Bartram, and put ye wi' your Cousin Knollys, or anywhere ye like best."

"Take me from Bartram — for twenty thousand pounds! Take me away from my guardian! You seem to forget, Sir," my indignation rising as I spoke, "that I can visit my cousin, Lady Knollys, whenever I please."



"Well, that is as it may be," he said, with a sulky deliberation, scraping about a little bit of paper that lay on the floor with the toe of his boot.

"It *is* as it may be, and that is as I say, Sir; and considering how you have treated me — your mean, treacherous, and infamous suit, and your cruel treason to your poor wife, I am amazed at your effrontery."

I turned to leave him, being, in truth, in one of my passions.

"Don't ye be a flyin' out," he said peremptorily, and catching me roughly by the wrist, "I baint a-going to vex ye. What a mouth you be, as can't see your way. Can't ye speak wi common sense, like a woman — dang it — for once, and not keep brawling like a brat — can't ye see what I'm saying? I'll take ye out o' all this, and put ye wi' your cousin, or wheresoever you list, if ye'll gie me what I say."

He was, for the first time, looking me in the face, but with contracted eyes, and a countenance very much agitated.

"Money?" said I, with a prompt disdain.

"Ay, money — twenty thousand pounds — *there*, On or off?" he replied, with an unpleasant sort of effort.

"You ask my promise for twenty thousand pounds, and you shan't have it."

My cheeks were flaming, and I stamped on the ground as I spoke.

If he had known how to appeal to my better feelings I am sure I should have done, perhaps not quite that, all at once at least, but something handsome, to assist him. But this application was so shabby and insolent! What could he take me for? That I should



suppose his placing me with Cousin Monica constituted her my guardian? Why, he must fancy me the merest baby. There was a kind of stupid cunning in this that disgusted my good-nature and outraged my self-importance.

"You won't gie me that then?" he said, looking down again, with a frown, and working his mouth and cheeks about as I could fancy a man rolling a piece of tobacco in his jaw.

"Certainly *not*, Sir," I replied.

"*Take* it then," he replied, still looking down, very black and discontented.

I joined Mary Quince, extremely angry. As I passed under the carved oak arch of the vestibule I saw his figure in the deepening twilight. The picture remains in its murky halo fixed in memory. Standing where he last spoke in the centre of the hall, not looking after me, but downward, and, as well as I could see, with the countenance of a man who has lost a game, and a ruinous wager too — that is black and desperate. I did not utter a syllable on the way up. When I reached my room I began to reconsider the interview more at my leisure. I was, such were my ruminations, to have agreed at once to his preposterous offer, and to have been driven, while he smirked and grimaced behind my back at his acquaintances, through Feltram in his dog-cart to Elverston; and then, to the just indignation of my uncle, to have been delivered up to Lady Knollys' guardianship, and to have handed my driver, as I alighted, the handsome fare of £20,000! It required the impudence of Tony Lumpkin, without either his fun or his shrewdness, to have conceived such a prodigious practical joke.



"Maybe you'd like a little tea, Miss," insinuated Mary Quince.

"What impertinence!" I exclaimed, with one of my angry stamps on the floor. "Not you, dear old Quince," I added. "No — no tea just now."

And I resumed my ruminations, which soon led me to this train of thought — "Stupid and insulting as Dudley's proposition was, it yet involved a great treason against my uncle. Should I be weak enough to be silent, may he not, wishing to forestal me, misrepresent all that has passed, so as to throw the blame altogether upon me."

This idea seized upon me with a force which I could not withstand; and on the impulse of the moment I obtained admission to my uncle, and related exactly what had passed. When I had finished my narrative, which he listened to without once raising his eyes, my uncle cleared his throat once or twice, as if to speak. He was smiling — I thought with an effort, and with elevated brows. When I concluded he hummed one of those sliding notes, which a less refined man might have expressed by a whistle of surprise and contempt, and again he essayed to speak, but continued silent. The fact is, he seemed to me very much disconcerted. He rose from his seat, and shuffled about the room in his slippers, I believe affecting only to be in search of something, opening and shutting two or three drawers, and turning over some books and papers, and, at length, taking up some loose sheets of manuscript, he appeared to have found what he was looking for, and began to read them carelessly, with his back towards me, and with another effort to clear his voice, he said at last —



"And pray, what could the fool mean by all that?"

"I think he must have taken me for an idiot, Sir," I answered.

"Not unlikely. He has lived in a stable, among horses and ostlers; he has always seemed to me something like a centaur — that is, a centaur composed not of man and horse, but of an ape and an ass."

And upon this jibe he laughed, not coldly and sarcastically, as was his wont, but, I thought, flurriedly. And, continuing to look into his papers, he said, his back still toward me as he read —

"And he did not favour you with an exposition of his meaning, which, except in so far as it estimated his deserts at the modest sum you have named, appears to me too oracular to be interpreted without a kindred inspiration."

And again he laughed. He was growing more like himself.

"As to your visiting your cousin, Lady Knollys, the stupid rogue had only five minutes before heard me express my wish that you should do so before leaving this. I am quite resolved you shall — that is, unless, dear Maud, you should yourself object; but, of course, we must wait for an invitation, which I conjecture will not be long in coming. In fact, your letter will naturally bring it about, and, I trust, open the way to a permanent residence with her. The more I think it over the more am I convinced, dear niece, that as things are likely to turn out, my roof would be no desirable shelter for you; and that, under all circumstances, hers would. Such were my motives, Maud, in opening, through your letter, a door of reconciliation between us."



I felt that I ought to have kissed his hand — that he had indicated precisely the future that I most desired; and yet there was within me a vague feeling, akin to suspicion — akin to dismay, which chilled and overcast my soul.

“But, Maud,” he said, “I am disquieted to think of that stupid jackanapes presuming to make you such an offer! A creditable situation truly — arriving in the dark at Elverston, under the solitary escort of that wild young man, with whom you would have fled from my guardianship! And, Maud, I tremble as I ask myself the question, would he have conducted you to Elverston at all? When you have lived as long in the world as I, you will appreciate its wickedness more justly.” Here there was a little pause.

“I know, my dear, that were he convinced of his legal marriage with that young woman,” he resumed, perceiving how startled I looked, “such an idea, of course, would not have entered his head; but he does not believe any such thing. Contrary to fact and logic, he does honestly think that his hand is still at his disposal; and I certainly do suspect that he would have employed that excursion in endeavouring to persuade you to think as he does. Be that how it may, however, it is satisfactory to me to know that you shall never more be troubled by one word from that ill-regulated young man. I made him my adieux, such as they were, this evening; and never more shall he enter the walls of Bartram-Haugh while we two live.”

Uncle Silas replaced the papers which had ostensibly interested him so much, and returned. There was a vein which was visible near the angle of his lofty temple, and in moments of agitation stood out against



the surrounding pallor in a knotted blue cord; and as he came back smiling askance, I saw this sign of inward tumult.

"We can, however, afford to despise the follies and knaveries of the world, Maud, so long as we act, as we have hitherto done, with perfect confidence in each other. Heaven bless you, dear Maud, your report troubled me, I believe, more than it need — troubled me a good deal; but reflection assures me it is nothing. He is gone. In a few days' time he will be on the sea. I will issue my orders to-morrow morning, and he will never more during his brief stay in England gain admission to Bartram-Haugh. Goodnight, my good niece, I thank you."

And so I returned to Mary Quince, on the whole happier than I had left her, but still with the confused and jarring vision I could not interpret perpetually rising before me; and as from time to time, shapeless anxieties agitated me, relieving them by appeals to Him who alone is wise and strong.

Next day brought me a good-natured gossiping letter from dear Milly, written in compulsory French, which was, in some places, very difficult to interpret. She gave me a very pleasant account of the place, and her opinion of the girls who were inmates, and mentioned some of the nuns with high commendation. The language plainly cramped poor Milly's genius; but although there was by no means so much fun as an honest English letter would have brought me, there could be no mistake about her liking the place, and she expressed her honest longing to see me in the most affectionate terms.

This letter came enclosed in one to my uncle, from



the proper authority in the convent; and as there was neither address within, nor postmark without, I was as much in the dark as ever as to poor Milly's whereabouts.

Pencilled across the envelope of this letter, in my uncle's hand, were the words "Let me have your answer when sealed, and I will transmit it. — S. R."

When, accordingly, some days later, I did place my letter to Milly in my uncle's hands, he told me the reason of his reserve on the subject.

"I thought it best, dear Maud, not to plague you with a secret, and Milly's present address is one. It will in a few weeks become the rallying point of our diverse routes, when you shall meet her, and I join you both. Nobody, until the storm shall have blown over, must know where I am to be found, except my lawyer; and I think you would prefer ignorance to the trouble of keeping a secret on which so much may depend."

This being reasonable, and even considerate, I acquiesced.

In that interval there reached me such a charming, gay, and affectionate letter — a very *long* letter, too — though the writer was scarcely seven miles away, from dear Cousin Monica, full of pleasant gossip, and rose-coloured and golden castles in the air, and the kindest interest in poor Milly, and the warmest affection for me.

One other incident varied that interval, if possible more pleasantly than those. It was the announcement, in a Liverpool paper, of the departure of the *Seamew*, bound for Melbourne; and among the passengers were reported "Dudley Ruthyn, Esquire, of Bartram-H., and Mrs. D. Ruthyn."

And now I began to breathe freely, I plainly saw the end of my probation approaching. A short excur-



sion to France, a happy meeting with Milly, and then a delightful residence with Cousin Monica for the remainder of my non-age.

You will say, then, that my spirits and my serenity were quite restored. Not quite. How marvellously lie our anxieties, in filmy layers, one over the other! Take away that which has lain on the upper surface for so long — the care of cares — the only one, as it seemed to you, between your soul and the radiance of Heaven — and straight you find a new stratum there. As physical science tells us no fluid is without its skin, so does it seem with this fine medium of the soul, and these successive films of care that form upon its surface on mere contact with the upper air and light.

What was my new trouble? A very fantastic one you will say — the illusion of a self-tormentor. It was the face of Uncle Silas which haunted me. Notwithstanding the old pale smile, there was a shrinking grimness, and the always averted look.

Sometimes I fancied his mind was disordered. I could not account for the eerie lights and shadows that flickered on his face, except so. There was a look of shame and fear of me, amazing as that seems, in the sheen of his peaked smile.

I thought, "Perhaps he blames himself for having tolerated Dudley's suit — for having urged it on grounds of personal distress — for having altogether lowered, though under sore temptation, both himself and his office; and he thinks that he has forfeited my respect."

Such was my analysis; but in the *coup-d'œil* of that white face that dazzled me in darkness, and haunted my daily reveries with a faded light, there was an intangible character of the insidious and the terrible.



## CHAPTER XIX.

## In Search of Mr. Charke's Skeleton.

On the whole, however, I was unspeakably relieved. Dudley Ruthyn, Esq., and Mrs. D. Ruthyn, were now skimming the blue waves on the wings of the *Seamew*, and every morning widened the distance between us, which was to go on increasing until it measured a point on the antipodes. The Liverpool paper containing this golden line was carefully preserved in my room; and like the gentleman who, when much tried by the shrewish heiress whom he had married, used to retire to his closet and read over his marriage settlement, I used, when blue devils haunted me, to unfold my newspaper and read the paragraph concerning the *Seamew*.

The day I now speak of was a dismal one of sleety snow. My own room seemed to me cheerier than the lonely parlour, where I could not have had good Mary Quince so decorously.

A good fire, that kind and trusty face, the peep I had just indulged in at my favourite paragraph, and the certainty of soon seeing my dear Cousin Monica, and afterwards affectionate Milly, raised my spirits.

"So," said I, "as old Wyat, you say, is laid up with rheumatism, and can't turn up to scold me, I think, I'll run up stairs and make an exploration, and find poor Mr. Charke's skeleton in a closet."

"Oh, law, Miss Maud, how can you say such



things!" exclaimed good old Quince, lifting up her honest gray head and round eyes from her knitting.

I had grown so familiar with the frightful tradition of Mr. Charke and his suicide, that I could now afford to frighten old Quince with him.

"I am quite serious. I am going to have a ramble up-stairs and down-stairs, like goosey-goosey-gander; and if I do light upon his chamber it is all the more interesting. I feel so like Adelaide, in the 'Romance of the Forest,' the book I was reading to you last night, when she commenced her delightful rambles through the interminable ruined abbey in the forest."

"Shall I go with you, Miss?"

"No, Quince; stay there; keep a good fire, and make some tea. I suspect I shall lose heart and return very soon;" and with a shawl about me, cowl fashion, over my head, I stole up stairs.

I shall not recount with the particularity of the conscientious heroine of Mrs. Ann Radcliffe, all the suites of apartments, corridors, and lobbies, which I threaded in my ramble. It will be enough to mention that I lighted upon a door at the end of a long gallery, which, I think, ran parallel with the front of the house; it interested me because it had the air of having been very long undisturbed. There were two rusty bolts, which did not evidently belong to its original securities, and had been, though very long ago, somewhat clumsily superadded. Dusty and rusty they were, but I had no difficulty in drawing them back. There was a rusty key, I remember it well, with a crooked handle, in the lock; I tried to turn it, but could not. My curiosity was piqued. I was thinking of going back and getting Mary Quince's assistance. It struck me,



however, that possibly it was not locked, so I pulled the door and it opened quite easily. I did not find myself in a strangely furnished suite of apartments, but at the entrance of a gallery, which diverged at right angles from that through which I had just passed; it was very imperfectly lighted, and ended in total darkness.

I began to think how far I had already come, and to consider whether I could retrace my steps with accuracy in case of a panic, and I had serious thoughts of returning.

The idea of Mr. Charke was growing unpleasantly sharp and menacing; and as I looked down the long space before me, losing itself among ambiguous shadows, lulled in a sinister silence, and as it were inviting my entrance like a trap, I was very near yielding to the cowardly impulse.

But I took heart of grace and determined to see a little more. I opened a side-door, and entered a large room, where were, in a corner, some rusty and cobwebbed bird cages, but nothing more. It was a wainscoted room, but a white mildew stained the panels. I looked from the window: it commanded that dismal, weed-choked quadrangle into which I had once looked from another window. I opened a door at its further end, and entered another chamber, not quite so large, but equally dismal, with the same prison-like look-out, not very easily discerned through the grimy panes and the sleet that was falling thickly outside. The door through which I had entered made a little accidental creak, and with my heart at my lips, I gazed at it, expecting to see Charke, or the skeleton of which I had talked so lightly, stalk in at the half-open aperture.



But I had an odd sort of courage which was always fighting against my cowardly nerves, and I walked to the door, and looking up and down the dismal passage, was reassured.

Well, one room more; just that whose deepset door fronted me, with a melancholy frown, at the opposite end of the chamber. So to it I glided, shoved it open, advancing one step, and the great bony figure of Madame de la Rougierre was before me.

I could see nothing else.

The drowsy traveller who opens his sheets to slip into bed, and sees a scorpion coiled between them, may have experienced a shock the same in kind, but immeasurably less in degree.

She sat in a clumsy old arm-chair, with an ancient shawl about her, and her bare feet in a delft tub. She looked a thought more withered. Her wig shoved back disclosed her bald wrinkled forehead, and enhanced the ugly effect of her exaggerated features and the gaunt hollows of her face. With a sense of incredulity and terror I gazed, freezing, at this evil phantom, who returned my stare for a few seconds with a shrinking scowl, dismal and grim, as of an evil spirit detected.

The meeting, at least then and there, was as complete a surprise for her as for me. She could not tell how I might take it; but she quickly rallied, burst into a loud screeching laugh, and, with her old Walpurgis gaiety, danced some fantastic steps in her bare wet feet, tracking the floor with water, and holding out with finger and thumb, in dainty caricature, her slammakin old skirt, while she sang some of her nasal patois with an abominable hilarity and emphasis.

With a gasp, I too recovered from the fascination



of the surprise. I could not speak though for some seconds, and Madame was first.

"Ah, dear Maud, what surprise! Are we not over-joy, dearest, and cannot speak? I am full of joy — quite charmed — *ravi* — of seeing you. So are you of me, your face betray. Ah! yes, thou dear little baboon! here is poor Madame once more! Who could have imagine?"

"I thought you were in France, Madame," I said, with a dismal effort.

"And so I was, dear Maud; I 'av just arrive. Your Uncle Silas he wrote to the superioress for gouvernante to accompany a young lady — that is you, Maud — on her journey, and she send me; and so, ma chère, here is poor Madame arrive to charge herself of that affair."

"How soon do we leave for France, Madame?" I asked.

"I do not know, but the old woman — wat is her name?"

"Wyat," I suggested.

"Oh! oui, Waiatt; — she says two, three week. And who conduct you to poor Madame's apartment, my dear Maud?" she inquired, insinuatingly.

"No one," I answered promptly: "I reached it quite accidentally, and I can't imagine why you should conceal yourself." Something like indignation kindled in my mind as I began to wonder at the sly strategy which had been practised upon me.

"I 'av not conceal myself, Mademoiselle," retorted the governess. "I 'av act precisally as I 'av been ordered. Your uncle, Mr. Silas Ruthyn, he is afraid, Waiat says, to be interrupted by his creditors, and



everything must be done very quaitly. I have been commanded to avoid *me faire voir*, you know, and I must obey my employer — voilà tout!”

“And for how long have you been residing here?” I persisted, in the same resentful vein.

“’Bout a week. It is soche triste place! I am so glad to see you, Maud. I’ve been so isolée, you dear leetle fool.”

“You are *not* glad, Madame; you don’t love me — you never did,” I exclaimed with sudden vehemence.

“Yes, I am *very* glad; you know not, chère petite *niaise*, how I ’av desire to educate you a leetle more. Let us understand one another. You think I do not love you, Mademoiselle, because you have mentioned to your poor papa that little *dérèglement* in his library. I have repent very often that so great indiscretion of my life. I thought to find some letters of Doctor Braierly. I think that man was trying to get your property, my dear Maud, and if I had found something I would tell you all about. But it was very great *sottise*, and you were very right to denounce me to Monsieur. Je n’ai point de rancune contre vous. No, no, none at all. On the contrary, I shall be your *gardien tutelaire* — wat you call? — guardian angel — ah, yes, that is it. You think I speak *par derision*, not at all. No, my dear cheaile, I do not speak *par moquerie*, unless perhaps the very least degree in the world.”

And with these words Madame laughed unpleasantly, showing the black caverns at the sides of her mouth, and with a cold, steady malignity in her gaze.

“Yes,” I said; “I know what you mean, Madame — you *hate* me.”



“Oh! wat great ogly word! I am shock! *vous me faites honte*. Poor Madame, she never hate any one; she loves all her friends, and her enemies she leaves to heaven; while I am, as you see, more gay, more *joyeuse* than ever, they have not been 'appy — no, they have not been fortunate those others. Wen I return I find always some of my enemy they 'av die, and some they have put themselves into embarrassment, or there has arrived to them some misfortune,” and Madame shrugged and laughed a little scornfully.

A kind of horror chilled my rising anger, and I was silent.

“You see, my dear Maud, it is very natural you should think I hate you. When I was with Mr. Austin Ruthyn, at Knowl, you know you did not like a me — never. But in consequence of our intimacy I confide you that which I 'av of most dear in the world, my reputation. It is always so. The pupil can *calomniate*, without been discover, the *gouvernante*. 'Av I not been always kind to you, Maud? Which 'av I use of violence or of sweetness the most? I am, like other persons, *jalouse de ma reputation*; and it was difficult to suffer with patience the banishment which was invoked by you, because chiefly for your good, and for an indiscretion to which I was excited by motives the most pure and laudable. It was you who spied so cleverly — eh! and denounce me to Monsieur Ruthyn? Helas! wat bad world it is!”

“I do not mean to speak at all about that occurrence, Madame; I will not discuss it. I dare say what you tell me of the cause of your engagement here is true, and I suppose we must travel, as you say, in



company; but you must know that the less we see of each other while in this house the better."

"I am not so sure of that, my sweet little *bête*; your education has been neglected, or rather entirely abandoned, since you 'av arrive at this place, I am told. You must not be a *bestiole*. We must do, you and I, as we are ordered. Mr. Silas Ruthyn he will tell us."

All this time Madame was pulling on her stockings, getting her boots on, and otherwise proceeding with her dowdy toilet. I do not know why I stood there talking to her. We often act very differently from what we would have done upon reflection. I had involved myself in a dialogue, as wiser generals than I have entangled themselves in a general action when they meant only an affair of outposts. I had grown a little angry, and would not betray the least symptom of fear, although I felt that sensation profoundly.

"My beloved father thought you so unfit a companion for me that he dismissed you at an hour's notice, and I am very sure that my uncle will think as he did; you are *not* a fit companion for me, and had my uncle known what had passed he would never have admitted you to this house — never!"

"Helas! *Quelle disgrace!* And you really think so, my dear Maud," exclaimed Madame, adjusting her wig before her glass, in the corner of which I could see half of her sly, grinning face, as she ogled herself in it.

"I do, and so do you, Madame," I replied, growing more frightened.

"It may be — we shall see; but every one is not so cruel as you, *ma chère petite calomniatrice*."



"You shan't call me those names," I said, in an angry tremor.

"What name, dearest cheaile?"

"*Calomniatrice* — that is an insult."

"Why, my most foolish little Maud, we may say rogue, and a thousand other little words in play which we do not say seriously."

"You are not playing — you never play — you are angry, and you hate me," I exclaimed vehemently.

"Oh, fie! — wat shame! Do you not perceive, dearest cheaile, how much education you still need? You are proud, little demoiselle; you must become, on the contrary, quait humble. Je ferai baisser le babouin à vous, ha, ha, ha! I weel make a you to kees the monkey. You are too proud, my dear cheaile."

"I am not such a fool as I was at Knowl," I said; "you shall not terrify me here. I will tell my uncle the whole truth," I said.

"Well, it may be, that is the best," she replied with provoking coolness.

"You think I don't mean it?"

"Of course you *do*," she replied.

"And we shall see what my uncle thinks of it."

"We shall see, my dear," she replied, with an air of mock contrition.

"Adieu, Madame!"

"You are going to Monsieur Ruthyn? — very good!"

I made her no answer, but more agitated than I cared to show her, I left the room. I hurried along the twilight passage, and turned into the long gallery that opened from it at right angles. I had not gone half a



dozen steps on my return when I heard a heavy tread and a rustling behind me.

"I am ready, my dear. I weel accompany you," said the smirking phantom hurrying after me.

"Very well," was my reply; and threading our way, with a few hesitations and mistakes, we reached and descended the stairs, and in a minute more stood at my uncle's door.

My uncle looked hard and strangely at us as we entered. He looked, indeed, as if his temper was violently excited, and glared and muttered to himself for a few seconds, and treating Madame to a stare of disgust, he asked peevishly —

"Why am I disturbed, pray?"

"Miss Maud a Ruthyn, she weel explain," replied Madame with a great courtesy, like a boat going down in a ground swell.

"*Will* you explain, my dear?" he asked in his coldest and most sarcastic tone.

I was agitated, and I am sure my statement was confused. I succeeded, however, in saying what I wanted.

"Why, Madame, this is a grave charge! Do you admit it, pray?"

Madame with the coolest possible effrontery denied it all; with the most solemn asseverations, and with streaming eyes and clasped hands conjured me melodramatically to withdraw that intolerable story, and to do her justice. I stared at her for a while astounded, and turning suddenly to my uncle, as vehemently asserted the truth of every syllable I had related.

"You hear, my dear child, you hear her deny everything; what am I to think? You must excuse



the bewilderment of my old head. Madame de la — that lady has arrived excellently recommended by the superioress of the place where dear Milly awaits you, and such persons are particular. It strikes me, my dear niece, that you must have made a mistake.”

I protested here. But he went on without seeming to hear the parenthesis —

“I know, my dear Maud, that you are quite incapable of wilfully deceiving any one; but you are liable to be deceived like other young people. You were, no doubt, very nervous and but half awake when you fancied you saw the occurrence you describe; and Madame de — de” —

“De la Rougierre,” I supplied.

“Yes, thank you — Madame de la Rougierre, who has arrived with excellent testimonials, strenuously denies the whole thing. Here is a conflict, my dear — in my mind a presumption of mistake. I confess I should prefer that theory to a peremptory assumption of guilt.”

I felt incredulous and amazed; it seemed as if a dream were being enacted before me. A transaction of the most serious import, which I had witnessed with my own eyes, and described with unexceptionable minuteness and consistency, is discredited by that strange and suspicious old man with an imbecile coolness. It was quite in vain my reiterating my statement, backing it with the most earnest asseverations. I was beating the air. It did not seem to reach his mind. It was all received with a simper of feeble incredulity.

He patted and smoothed my head — he laughed gently, and shook his, while I insisted; and Madame



protested her purity in now tranquil floods of innocent tears, and murmured mild and melancholy prayers for my enlightenment and reformation. I felt as if I should lose my reason.

"There now, dear Maud, we have heard enough; it is, I do believe, a delusion. Madame de la Rougierre will be your companion, at the utmost, for three or four weeks. Do exercise a little of your self-command and good sense — you know how I am tortured. Do not, I entreat, add to my perplexities. You may make yourself very happy with Madame if you will, I have no doubt."

"I propose to Mademoiselle," said Madame, drying her eyes with a gentle alacrity, "to profit of my visit for her education. But she does not seem to weesh wat I think is so useful."

"She threatened me with some horrid French vulgarism — *de faire baiser le babouin à moi*, whatever that means; and I know she hates me," I replied impetuously.

"Doucement — doucement!" said my uncle, with a smile at once amused and compassionate. "Doucement! ma chère."

With her great hands and cunning eyes uplifted, Madame tearfully — for her tears came on short notice — again protested her absolute innocence. She had never in all her life so much as heard one so villain phrase.

"You see, my dear, you have misheard; young people never attend. You will do well to take advantage of Madame's short residence to get up your French a little, and the more you are with her the better."



"I understand then, Mr. Ruthyn, you weesh I should resume my instructions?" asked Madame.

"Certainly; and converse all you can in French with Mademoiselle Maud. You will be glad, my dear, that I've insisted on it," he said, turning to me, "when you have reached France, where you will find they speak nothing else. And now, dear Maud — no, not a word more — you must leave me. Farewell, Madame!"

And he waved us out a little impatiently; and I, without one look toward Madame de la Rougierre, stunned and incensed, walked into my room and shut the door.



## CHAPTER XX.

## The Foot of Hercules.

I STOOD at the window — still the same leaden sky and feathery sleet before me — trying to estimate the magnitude of the discovery I had just made. Gradually a kind of despair seized me, and I threw myself passionately on my bed, weeping aloud.

Good Mary Quince was, of course, beside me in a moment, with her pale, concerned face.

“Oh, Mary, Mary, she’s come — that dreadful woman, Madame de la Rougierre, has come, to be my governess again; and Uncle Silas won’t hear or believe anything about her. It is vain talking; he is prepossessed. Was ever so unfortunate a creature as I? who could have fancied or feared such a thing? Oh, Mary, Mary, what am I to do? what is to become of me? am I never to shake off that vindictive, terrible woman?”

Mary said all she could to console me. I was making too much of her. What was she after all more than a governess? — she could not hurt me. I was not a child no longer — she could not bully me now; and my uncle, though he might be deceived for a while, would not be long finding her out.

Thus and soforth did good Mary Quince declaim, and, at last, she did impress me a little, and I began to think that I had, perhaps, been making too much of Madame’s visit. But still imagination, that instrument



and mirror of prophecy, showed her formidable image always on its surface, with a terrible moving background of shadows.

In a few minutes there was a knock at my door, and Madame herself entered. She was in walking costume. There had been a brief clearing of the weather, and she proposed our making a promenade together.

On seeing Mary Quince she broke into a rapture of compliment and greeting, and took what Mr. Richardson would have called her passive hand, and pressed it with wonderful tenderness.

Honest Mary suffered all this somewhat reluctantly, never smiling, and, on the contrary, looking rather ruefully at her feet.

"Weel you make a some tea? when I come back, dear Mary Quince, I 'av so much to tell you and dear Miss Maud of all my adventures while I 'av been away; it will make a you laugh ever so much. I was — what you theenk? — near, ever so near to be married!" And upon this she broke into a screeching laugh, and shook Mary Quince merrily by the shoulder.

I sullenly declined going out, or rising; and when she had gone away, I told Mary that I should confine myself to my room while Madame stayed.

But self-denying ordinances self-imposed are not always long observed by youth. Madame de la Rougierre laid herself out to be agreeable; she had no end of stories — more than half, no doubt, pure fictions — to tell, but all, in that triste place, amusing. Mary Quince began to entertain a better opinion of her. She actually helped to make beds, and tried to be in every way of use, and seemed to have quite turned



over a new leaf; and so gradually she moved me, first to listen, and at last to talk.

On the whole these terms were better than a perpetual skirmish; but, notwithstanding all her gossip and friendliness, I continued to have a profound distrust and even terror of her.

She seemed curious about the Bartram-Haugh family, and all their ways, and listened darkly when I spoke. I told her, bit by bit, the whole story of Dudley, and she used, whenever there was news of the *Seamew*, to read to paragraph for my benefit; and in poor Milly's battered little atlas she used to trace the ship's course with a pencil, writing in, from point to point, the date at which the vessel was "spoken" at sea. She seemed amused at the irrepressible satisfaction with which I received these minutes of his progress; and she used to calculate the distance; — on such a day he was two hundred and sixty miles, on such another five hundred; the last point was more than eight hundred — good, better, best — best of all would be those "deleecious antipode, w'ere he would so soon promener on his head twelve thousand mile away;" and at the conceit she would fall into screams of laughter.

Laugh as she might, however, there was substantial comfort in thinking of the boundless stretch of blue wave that rolled between me and that villainous cousin.

I was now on very odd terms with Madame. She had not relapsed into her favourite vein of oracular sarcasm and menace. She had, on the contrary, affected her good-humoured and genial vein. But I was not to be deceived by this. I carried in my heart that deep-seated fear of her which her unpleasant good-humour and gaiety never disturbed for a moment. I was very



glad, therefore, when she went to Todcaster by rail, to make some purchases for the journey which we were daily expecting to commence; and happy in the opportunity of a walk, good old Mary Quince and I set forth for a little ramble.

As I wished to make some purchases in Feltram, I set out, with Mary Quince for my companion. On reaching the great gate we found it locked. The key, however, was in it, and as it required more than the strength of my hand to turn, Mary tried it. At the same moment old Crowle came out of the sombre lodge by its side, swallowing down a mouthful of his dinner in haste. No one, I believe, liked the long, suspicious face of the old man, seldom shorn or washed, and furrowed with great, grimy perpendicular wrinkles. Leering fiercely at Mary, not pretending to see me, he wiped his mouth hurriedly with the back of his hand, and growled—

“Drop it.”

“Open it, please, Mr. Crowle,” said Mary, renouncing the task.

Crowle wiped his mouth as before, looking inauspicious; shuffling to the spot, and, muttering to himself, he first satisfied himself that the lock was fast, and then lodged the key in his coat-pocket, and still muttering, retraced his steps.

“We want the gate open, please,” said Mary.

No answer.

“Miss Maud wants to go into the town,” she insisted.

“We wants many a thing we can’t get,” he growled, stepping into his habitation.

“Please open the gate,” I said, advancing.



He half turned on his threshold, and made a dumb show of touching his hat, although he had none on.

"Can't ma'am; without an order from maister, no one goes out here."

"You won't allow me and my maid to pass the gate?" I said.

"'Tisn't *me*, ma'am," said he; "but I can't break orders, and no one goes out without the master allows."

And without awaiting further parley, he entered, shutting his hatch behind him.

So Mary and I stood, looking very foolish at one another. This was the first restraint I had experienced since Milly and I had been refused a passage through the Windmill paling. The rule, however, on which Crowle insisted I felt confident could not have been intended to apply to me. A word to Uncle Silas would set all right; and in the meantime I proposed to Mary that we should take a walk — my favourite ramble — into the Windmill Wood.

I looked toward Dickon's farmstead as we passed, thinking that Beauty might have been there. I did see the girl, who was plainly watching us. She stood in the doorway of the cottage, withdrawn into the shade, and, I fancied, anxious to escape observation. When we had passed on a little, I was confirmed in that belief by seeing her run down the footpath which led from the rear of the farm-yard in the direction contrary to that in which we were moving.

"So," I thought, "poor Meg falls from me!"

Mary Quince and I rambled on through the wood, till we reached the windmill itself, and seeing its low arched door open, we entered the chiaro-oscuro of its circular basement. As we did so I heard a rush and



and the creak of a plank, and looking up, I saw just a foot — no more — disappearing through the trap-door.

In the case of one we love or fear intensely, what feats of comparative anatomy will not the mind unconsciously perform? constructing the whole living animal from the turn of an elbow, the curl of a whisker, a segment of a hand. How instantaneous and unerring is the instinct!

“Oh, Mary, what have I seen!” I whispered, recovering from the fascination that held my gaze fast to the topmost rounds of the ladder, that disappeared in the darkness above the open door in the loft. “Come, Mary — come away.”

At the same instant appeared the swarthy, sullen face of Dickon Hawkes in the shadow of the aperture. Having but one serviceable leg his descent was slow and awkward, and having got his head to the level of the loft he stopped to touch his hat to me and to hasp and lock the trap-door.

When this was done the man again touched his hat, and looked steadily and searchingly at me for a second or so, while he got the key into his pocket.

“These fellahs stores their flour too long 'ere, ma'am. There's a deal o'trouble a lookin' arter it. I'll talk wi' Silas, and settle that.”

By this time he had got upon the worn tiled floor, and touching his hat again he said—

“I'm a goin' to lock the door, ma'am!”

So with a start, and again whispering—

“Come, Mary — come away.”

With my arm fast in hers we made a swift departure.

“I feel very faint, Mary,” said I. “Come quickly. There's nobody following us?”



"No, Miss, dear. That man with the wooden leg is putting a padlock on the door."

"Come *very* fast," I said; and when we had got a little further I said, "Look again, and see whether any one is following."

"No one, Miss," answered Mary, plainly surprised. "He's putting the key in his pocket, and standin' there a lookin' after us."

"Oh, Mary, did not you see it?"

"What, Miss?" asked Mary, almost stopping.

"Come on, Mary. Don't pause. They will observe us," I whispered, hurrying her forward.

"What did you see, Miss?" repeated Mary.

"*Mr. Dudley*," I whispered with a terrified emphasis, not daring to turn my head as I spoke.

"Lawk, Miss!" remonstrated honest Quince, with a protracted intonation of wonder and incredulity, which plainly implied a suspicion that I was dreaming.

"Yes, Mary. When we went into that dreadful room — that dark, round place — I saw his foot on the ladder. *His* foot; Mary. I can't be mistaken. I *won't* be questioned. You'll find I'm right. He's *here*. He never went in that ship at all. A fraud has been practised on me. It is infamous — it is terrible. I'm frightened out of my life. For heaven's sake, look back again, and tell me what you see."

"*Nothing*, Miss," answered Mary, in contagious whispers, "but that wooden-legged chap, standin' hard by the door."

"And no one with him?"

"No one, Miss."

We got without pursuit through the gate in the paling. I drew breath so soon as we had reached the



cover of the thicket near the chestnut hollow, and I began to reflect that whoever the owner of the foot might be — and I was still instinctively certain that it was no other than Dudley — concealment was plainly his object. I need not, then, be at all uneasy lest he should pursue us.

As we walked slowly and in silence along the grassy footpath I heard a voice calling my name from behind. Mary Quince had not heard it at all, but I was quite certain.

It was repeated twice or thrice, and, looking in considerable doubt and trepidation under the hanging boughs, I saw Beauty, not ten yards away, standing warily among the underwood.

I remember how white the eyes and teeth of the swarthy girl looked, as with hand uplifted toward her ear she watched us while, as it seemed, listening for more distant sounds.

Beauty beckoned eagerly to me, advancing, with looks of great fear and anxiety, two or three short steps toward me.

"*She baint to come,*" said Beauty under her breath so soon as I had nearly reached her, pointing without raising her hand at Mary Quince.

"Tell her to sit on the ash-tree stump down yonder, and call ye as loud as she can if she sees any fellah a comin' this way, an' rin ye back to me;" and she impatiently beckoned me away on her errand.

When I returned, having made this disposition, I perceived how pale the girl was.

"Are you ill, Meg?" I asked.

"Never ye mind. Well enough. Listen, Miss; I must tell it all in a crack, an' if she calls, rin awa' to



her, an' le' me to myself, for if fayther or t'other un wor to kotch me here, I think they'd kill me a'most. Hish!"

She paused a second, looking askance, in the direction where she fancied Mary Quince was. Then she resumed in a whisper —

"Now, lass, mind ye, ye'll keep what I say to yourself. You're not to tell that un nor any other for your life, mind, a word o' what I'm goin' to tell ye."

"I'll not say a word. Go on."

"Did ye see Dudley?"

"I think I saw him getting up the ladder."

"In the mill? Ha! that's him. He never went beyond Todcaster. He staid in Feltram arter."

It was my turn to look pale now. My worst conjecture was established.



## CHAPTER XXI.

## I Conspire.

"THAT'S a bad un, he is — oh, Miss, Miss, Maud! It's nout that's good as keeps him an' fayther — (mind, lass, ye promised you would not tell no one) — as keeps them two a talkin' and a smokin' secret-like together in the mill. An' fayther don't know I found him out. They don't let me into the town, but Brice tells me, and he knows it's Dudley; and it's nout that's good, but summat very bad. An' I reckon, Miss, it's all about you. Be ye frightened, Miss Maud?"

I felt on the point of fainting, but I rallied.

"Not much, Meg. Go on. For Heaven's sake, does Uncle Silas know he is here?"

"Well, Miss, they were with him, Brice told me, from eleven o'clock to nigh one o' Tuesday night, an' went in and come out like thieves, 'feard ye'd see 'em."

"And how does Brice know it is anything bad?" I asked, with a strange freezing sensation creeping from my heels to my head and down again — I am sure deadly pale, but speaking very collectedly.

"Brice said, Miss, he saw Dudley a cryin' and lookin' awful black, and says he to fayther, 'Tisn't in my line nohow, an' I can't;' and says fayther to he, 'No one likes they soart o' things, but how can ye help it? The old boy's behind ye wi' his pitchfork, and ye canna stop.' An' wi' that he bethought him o'



Brice, and says he, 'What be ye a doin' there? Get ye down wi' the nags to blacksmith, do ye.' An' oop gits Dudley, pullin' his hat ower his brows, an' says he, 'I wish I was in the *Seamew*. I'm good for nout wi' this thing a hangin' ower me.' An' that's all as Brice heard. An' he's afeard o' fayther and Dudley awful. Dudley could lick him to pot if he crossed him, and he and fayther u'd think nout o' havin' him afore the justices for poachin' and swearin' him into gaol."

"But why does he think it's about *me*?"

"Hish!" said Meg, who fancied she heard a sound, but all was quiet. "I can't stay — we're in danger, lass. I don't know why — but *he* does, an' so do I, an', for that matter, so do *ye*."

"Meg, I'll leave Bartram."

"Ye can't."

"Can't. What do you mean, girl?"

"They won't let ye oot. The gates is all locked. They've dogs — they've bloodhounds, Brice says. Ye *can't* git oot, mind; put that oot o' your head."

"I tell ye what ye'll do. Write a bit o' a note to the lady yonder at Elverston; and though Brice be a wild fellah, and 'appen not ower good sometimes, he likes me, an' I'll make him take it. Fayther will be grindin' at mill to-morrow. Coom ye here about one o'clock — that's if ye see the mill sails a-turnin' — and me and Brice will meet ye here. Bring that old lass wi' ye. There's an old French un, though, that talks wi' Dudley. Mind ye, that un knows nout o' the matter. Brice be a kind lad to me, watsoe'er he be wi' others, and I think he won't split. Now, lass, I must go. God help ye; God bless ye; an', for the



world's wealth, don't ye let one o' them see ye've got ought in your head, not even that un."

Before I could say another word the girl had glided from me, with a wild gesture of silence, and a shake of her head.

I can't at all account for the state in which I was. There are resources both of energy and endurance in human nature which we never suspect until the tremendous voice of necessity summons them into play. Petrified with a totally new horror, but with something of the coldness and impassiveness of the transformation, I stood, spoke, and acted — a wonder, almost a terror, to myself.

I met Madame on my return as if nothing had happened. I heard her ugly gabble, and looked at the fruits of her hour's shopping, as I might hear, and see, and talk, and smile, in a dream.

But the night was dreadful. When Mary Quince and I were alone, I locked the door. I continued walking up and down the room, with my hands clasped, looking at the inexorable floor, the walls, the ceiling, with a sort of imploring despair. I was afraid to tell my dear old Mary. The least indiscretion would be failure, and failure destruction.

I answered her perplexed solitudes by telling her that I was not very well — that I was uneasy; but I did not fail to extract from her a promise that she would not hint to mortal, either my suspicions about Dudley, or our rencontre with Meg Hawkes.

I remember how, when, after we had got, late at night, into bed, I sat up, shivering with horror, in mine, while honest Mary's tranquil breathing told how soundly she slept. I got up, and looked from the



window, expecting to see some of those wolfish dogs which they had brought to the place prowling about the court-yard. Sometimes I prayed, and felt tranquillized, and fancied that I was perhaps to have a short interval of sleep. But the serenity was delusive, and all the time my nerves were strung hysterically. Sometimes I felt quite wild, and on the point of screaming. At length that dreadful night passed away. Morning came, and a less morbid, though hardly a less terrible state of mind. Madame paid me an early visit. A thought struck me. I knew that she loved shopping, and I said, quite carelessly —

“Your yesterday’s shopping tempts me, Madame, and I must get a few things before we leave for France. Suppose we go into Feltram to-day, and make my purchases, you and I?”

She looked from the corner of her cunning eye in my face without answering. I did not blench, and she said —

“Vary good. I would be vary ’appy,” and again she looked oddly at me.

“Wat hour, my dear Maud? One o’clock? I think that weel do very well, eh?”

I assented, and she grew silent.

I wonder whether I did look as careless as I tried. I do not know. Through the whole of this awful period I was, I think, supernatural; and I even now look back with wonder upon my strange self-command.

Madame, I hoped, had heard nothing of the order which prohibited my exit from the place. She would herself conduct me to Feltram, and secure, by accompanying me, my free egress.



Once in Feltram, I would assert my freedom, and manage to reach my dear Cousin Knollys. Back to Bartram no power should convey me. My heart swelled and fluttered in the awful suspense of that hour.

Oh, Bartram-Haugh! how came you by those lofty walls? Which of my ancestors had begirt me with an impassable barrier in this horrible strait?

Suddenly I remembered my letter to Lady Knollys. If I were disappointed in effecting my escape through Feltram, all would depend upon it.

Having locked my door, I wrote as follows: —

“Oh, my beloved cousin, as you hope for comfort in *your* hour of fear, aid me now. Dudley has returned, and is secreted somewhere about the grounds. It is a *fraud*. They all pretend to me that he is gone away in the *Seamew*; and he or they had his name published as one of the passengers. Madame de la Rougierre has appeared! She is here, and my uncle insists on making her my close companion. I am at my wits' ends. I cannot escape — the walls are a prison; and I believe the eyes of my gaolers are always upon me. Dogs are kept for pursuit — yes, *dogs!* and the gates are locked against my escape. God help me! I don't know where to look, or whom to trust. I fear my uncle more than all. I think I could bear this better if I knew what their plans are, even the worst. If ever you loved or pitied me, dear cousin, I conjure you, help me in this extremity. Take me away from this. Oh, darling, for God's sake, take me away!

“Your distracted and terrified cousin,  
“*Bartram-Haugh.*”

“MAUD.”



I sealed this letter jealously, as if the inanimate missive would burst its cerements, and proclaim my desperate appeal through all the chambers and passages of silent Bartram.

Old Quince, greatly to Cousin Monica's amusement, persisted in furnishing me with those capacious pockets which belonged to a former generation. I was glad of this old-world eccentricity now, and placed my guilty letter, that amidst all my hypocrisies, spoke out with such terrible frankness, deep in this receptacle, and having hid away the pen and ink, my accomplices, I opened the door, and resumed my careless looks, awaiting Madame's return.

"I was to demand to Mr. Ruthyn the permission to go to Feltram, and I think he will allow. He wants to speak to you."

With Madame I entered my uncle's room. He was reclining on a sofa, his back towards us, and his long white hair, as fine as spun glass, hung over the back of the couch.

"I was going to ask you, dear Maud, to execute two or three little commissions for me in Feltram."

My dreadful letter felt lighter in my pocket, and my heart beat violently.

"But I have just recollected that this is a market-day, and Feltram will be full of doubtful characters and tipsy persons, so we must wait till to-morrow; and Madame says, very kindly, that she will, as she does not so much mind, make any little purchases to-day which cannot conveniently wait."

Madame assented with a courtesy to Uncle Silas, and a great hollow smile to me.

By this time Uncle Silas had raised himself from



his reclining posture, and was sitting, gaunt and white upon the sofa.

"News of my prodigal to-day," he said, with a peevish smile, drawing the newspaper towards him. "The vessel has been spoken again. How many miles away, do you suppose?"

He spoke in a plaintive key, looking at me, with hungry eyes, and a horribly smiling countenance.

"How far do you suppose Dudley is to-day?" and he laid the palm of his hand on the paragraph as he spoke. "*Guess!*"

For a moment I fancied this was a theatric preparation to give point to the disclosure of Dudley's real whereabouts.

"It was a very long way. *Guess!*" he repeated.

So, stammering a little and pale, I performed the required hypocrisy, after which my uncle read aloud for my benefit the line or two in which were recorded the event, and the latitude and longitude of the vessel at the time, of which Madame made a note in her memory, for the purpose of making her usual tracing in poor Milly's atlas.

I cannot say how it really was, but I fancied that Uncle Silas was all the time reading my countenance, with a grim and practised scrutiny; but nothing came of it, and we were dismissed.

Madame loved shopping, even for its own sake, but shopping with opportunities of speculation still more. As she had had her luncheon, and was dressed for the excursion, she did precisely what I now most desired — she proposed to take charge of my commissions and my money, and thus intrusted, left me at liberty to keep tryst at the Chestnut Hollow.



So soon as I had seen Madame fairly off, I hurried Mary Quince, and got my things on quickly. We left the house by the side entrance, which I knew my uncle's windows did not command. Glad was I to feel a slight breeze, enough to make the mill-sails revolve; and as we got further into the grounds, and obtained a distant view of the picturesque old windmill, I felt inexpressibly relieved on seeing that it was actually working.

We were now in the Chestnut Hollow, and I sent Mary Quince to her old point of observation, which commanded a view of the path in the direction of the Windmill Wood, with her former order to call "I've found it" as loudly as she could, in case she should see any one approaching.

I stopped at the point of our yesterday's meeting. I peered under the branches, and my heart beat fast as I saw Meg Hawkes awaiting me.



## CHAPTER XXII.

## The Letter.

"COME away, lass," whispered Beauty, very pale; "he's here — Tom Brice."

And she led the way, shoving aside the leafless underwood, and we reached Tom. The slender youth, groom or poacher — he might answer for either — with his short coat and gaitered legs, was sitting on a low horizontal bough, with his shoulder against the trunk.

"*Don't* ye mind, sit ye still, lad," said Meg, observing that he was preparing to rise, and had entangled his hat in the boughs. "Sit ye still, and hark to the lady. He'll take it, Miss Maud, if he can; wi' na ye, lad?"

"E'es, I'll take it," he replied, holding out his hand.

"Tom Brice, you won't deceive me?"

"Noa, sure," said Tom and Meg nearly in the same breath.

"You are an honest English lad, Tom — you would not betray me?" I was speaking imploringly.

"Noa, sure," repeated Tom.

There was something a little unsatisfactory in the countenance of this light-haired youth, with the sharpish up-turned nose. Throughout our interview he said next to nothing, and smiled lazily to himself, like a man listening to a child's solemn nonsense, and lead-



ing it on, with an amused irony, from one wise sally to another.

Thus it seemed to me that this young clown, without in the least intending to be offensive, was listening to me with a profound and lazy mockery.

I could not choose, however, and such as he was I must employ him or none.

"Now, Tom Brice, a great deal depends on this."

"That's true for her, Tom Brice," said Meg, who now and then confirmed my asseverations.

"I'll give you a pound *now*, Tom," and I placed the coin and the letter together in his hand. "And you are to give this letter to Lady Knollys at Elverston; you know Elverston, don't you?"

"He does, Miss. Don't ye, lad?"

"E'es."

"Well, do so, Tom, and I'll be good to you so long as I live."

"D'ye hear, lad?"

"E'es," said Tom; "it's very good."

"You'll take the letter, Tom?" I said, in much greater trepidation as to his answer than I showed.

"E'es, I'll take the letter," said he, rising, and turning it about in his fingers under his eye, like a curiosity.

"Tom Brice," I said, "if you can't be true to me, say so; but don't take the letter except to give it to Lady Knollys at Elverston. If you won't promise that, let me have the note back. Keep the pound; but tell me that you won't mention my having asked you to carry a letter to Elverston to any one."

For the first time Tom looked perfectly serious. He twiddled the corner of my letter between his finger



and thumb, and wore very much the countenance of a poacher about to be committed.

"I don't want to chouce ye, Miss; but I must take care o' myself, ye see. The letters goes all through Silas's fingers to the post, and he'd know damn well this worn't among 'em. They do say he opens 'em, and reads 'em before they go; an' that's his diversion. I don't know; but I do believe that's how it be; an' if this one turned up, they'd all know it went be hand, and I'd be spotted for't."

"But you know who I am, Tom; and I'd save you," said I, eagerly.

"Ye'd want savin' yerself, I'm thinkin', if that fell oot," said Tom, cynically. "I don't say, though, I'll not take it — only this — I won't run my head again a wall for no one."

"Tom," I said, with a sudden inspiration, "give me back the letter, and take me out of Bartram; take me to Elverston; it will be the best thing — for *you*, Tom, I mean — it will indeed — that ever befell you."

With this clown I was pleading, as for my life; my hand was on his sleeve. I was gazing imploringly in his face.

But it would not do; Tom Brice looked amused again, swung his head a little on one side, grinning sheepishly over his shoulder on the roots of the trees beside him, as if he were striving to keep himself from an uncivil fit of laughter.

"I'll do what a wise lad may, Miss; but ye don't know they lads; they baint that easy come over; and I won't get knocked on the head, nor sent to gaol 'appen, for no good to thee nor me. There's Meg



there, she knows well enough, I could na manage that; so I won't try it, Miss, by no chance; no offence, Miss; but I'd rayther not, an I'll just try what I can make o' this; that's all I can do for ye."

Tom Brice, with these words, stood up, and looked uneasily in the direction of the Windmill Wood.

"Mind ye, Miss, coom what will, ye'll not tell o' me?"

"Whar'll ye go now, Tom?" inquired Meg, uneasily.

"Never ye mind, lass," answered he, breaking his way through the thicket, and soon disappearing.

"E'es, that'll be it — he'll git into the sheep-walk behind the mound. They're all down yonder; git ye back, Miss, to the hoose — be the side-door; mind ye, don't go round the corner; and I'll jest sit awhile among the bushes, and wait a good time for a start. And good-bye, Miss; and don't ye show like as if there was aught out o' common on your mind. Hish!"

There was a distant hallooing.

"That be fayther!" she whispered, with a very blank countenance, and listened with her sunburnt hand to her ear.

"Tisn't me, only Davy he'll be callin'," she said, with a great sigh, and a joyless smile. "Now git ye away i' God's name."

So running lightly along the path, under cover of this thick wood, I recalled Mary Quince, and together we hastened back again to the house, and entered, as directed, by the side-door, which did not expose us to be seen from the Windmill Wood; and, like two criminals, we stole up by the back stairs, and so through



the side gallery to my room; and there sat down to collect my wits, and try to estimate the exact effect of what had just occurred.

Madame had not returned. That was well; she always visited my room first, and everything was precisely as I had left it — a certain sign that her prying eyes and busy fingers had not been at work during my absence.

When she did appear, strange to say, it was to bring me unexpected comfort. She had in her hand a letter from my dear Lady Knollys — a gleam of sunlight from the free and happy outer world entered with it. The moment Madame left me to myself, I opened it and read as follows: —

“I am so happy, my dearest Maud, in the immediate prospect of seeing you. I have had a really kind letter from poor Silas — *poor*, I say, for I really compassionate his situation, about which he has been, I do believe, quite frank; at least, Ilbury says so — and somehow he happens to know. I have had quite an affecting, changed letter. I will tell you all when I see you. He wants me ultimately to undertake that which would afford me the most unmixed happiness — I mean the care of you, my dear girl. I only fear lest my too eager acceptance of the trust should excite that vein of opposition which is in most human beings, and induce him to think over his offer less favourably again. He says I must come to Bartram, and stay a night, and promises to lodge me comfortably; about which last, I honestly do not care a pin, when the chance of a comfortable evening’s gossip with you is in view. Silas explains his sad situation, and must hold



himself in readiness for early flight, if he would avoid the risk of losing his personal liberty. It is a sad thing that he should have so irretrievably ruined himself, that poor Austin's liberality seems to have positively precipitated his extremity. His great anxiety is that I should see you before you leave for your short stay in France. He thinks you must leave before a fortnight. I was thinking of asking you to come over here; I know you would be just as well at Elverston as in France; but perhaps, as he seems disposed to do what we all wish, it may be safer to let him set about it in his own way. The truth is I have so set my heart upon it that I fear to risk it by crossing him even in a trifle. He says I must fix an early day next week, and talks as if he meant to urge me to make a longer visit than he defined. I shall be only too happy. I begin, my dear Maud, to think that there is no use in trying to control events, and that things often turn out best, and most exactly to our wishes, by being left quite to themselves. I think it was Talleyrand who praised the talent of *waiting* so much. In high spirits, and with my head brimful of plans, I remain, dearest Maud, ever your affectionate cousin,

“MONICA.”

Here was an inexplicable puzzle! A faint radiance of hope, however, began to overspread a landscape only a few minutes before darkened by total eclipse; but construct what theory I might, all were inconsistent with many well-established and awful incongruities, and their wrecks lay strown over the troubled waters of the gulf into which I gazed.

Why was Madame here? Why was Dudley con-



cealed about the place? Why was I a prisoner within the walls? What were those dangers which Meg Hawkes seemed to think so great and so imminent as to induce her to risk her lover's safety for my deliverance? All these menacing facts stood grouped together against the dark certainty that never were men more deeply interested in making away with one human being, than were Uncle Silas and Dudley in removing me.

Sometimes to these dreadful evidences I abandoned my soul. Sometimes, reading Cousin Monica's sunny letter, the sky would clear, and my terrors melt away like nightmares in the morning. I never repented, however, that I had sent my letter by Tom Brice. Escape from Bartram-Haugh was my hourly longing.

That evening Madame invited herself to tea with me. I did not object. It was better just then to be on friendly relations with everybody if possible, even on their own terms. She was in one of her boisterous and hilarious moods, and there was a perfume of brandy.

She narrated some compliments paid her that morning in Feltram by that "good crayature," Mrs. Litheways, the silk mercer, and what "'ansom faylow" was her new foreman — (she intended plainly that I should "queez" her) — and how "he follow" her with his eyes wherever she went. I thought, perhaps, he fancied she might pocket some of his laces or gloves. And all the time her great wicked eyes were rolling and glancing according to her ideas of fascination, and her bony face grinning and flaming with the "strong drink" in which she delighted. She sang twaddling chansons, and being, as was her wont, under such exhilarating



influences in a vapouring mood, she vowed that I should have my carriage and horses immediately.

"I weel try what I can do weeth your Uncle Silas. We are very good old friends. Mr. Ruthyn and I," she said with a leer which I did not understand, and which yet frightened me.

I never could quite understand why these Jezebels like to insinuate the dreadful truth against themselves; but they do. Is it the spirit of feminine triumph overcoming feminine shame, and making them vaunt their fall as an evidence of bygone fascination and existing power? Need we wonder? Have not women preferred hatred to indifference, and the reputation of witchcraft, with all its penalties, to absolute insignificance? Thus, as they enjoyed the fear inspired among simple neighbours by their imagined traffic with the father of ill, did Madame, I think, relish with a cynical vainglory the suspicion of her Satanic superiority.

Next morning Uncle Silas sent for me. He was seated at his table, and spoke his little French greeting, smiling as usual, pointing to a chair opposite.

"How far, I forget," he said, carelessly laying his newspaper on the table, "did you yesterday guess Dudley to be?"

Eleven hundred miles, I thought it was.

"Oh, yes, so it was;" and then there was an abstracted pause. "I have been writing to Lord Ilbury, your trustee," he resumed. "I ventured to say, my dear Maud — (for having thoughts of a different arrangement for you, more suitable under my distressing circumstances, I do not wish to vacate without some expression of your estimate of my treatment of you while under my roof) — I ventured to say that you



thought me kind, considerate, indulgent — may I say so?"

I assented. What could I say?

"I said you had enjoyed our poor way of living here — our rough ways and liberty. Was I right?"

Again, I assented.

"And in fact that you had nothing to object against your poor old uncle, except, indeed, his poverty, which you forgave. I think I said truth. Did I, dear Maud?"

Again, I acquiesced.

All this time he was fumbling among the papers in his coat-pocket.

"That is satisfactory. So I expected you to say," he murmured. "I expected no less."

On a sudden a frightful change spread across his face. He rose like a spectre with a white scowl.

"Then how do you account for that?" he shrieked in a voice of thunder, and smiting my open letter to Lady Knollys, face upward, upon the table.

I stared at my uncle, unable to speak, until I seemed to lose sight of him; but his voice, like a bell, still yelled in my ears.

"There! young hypocrite and liar! explain that farrago of slander which you bribed my servant to place in the hands of my kinswoman, Lady Knollys."

And so on and on it went, I gazing into darkness, until the voice itself became indistinct, grew into a buzz, and hummed away into silence.

I think I must have had a fit.

When I came to myself I was drenched with water, my hair, face, neck, and dress. I did not in the least know where I was. I thought my father was ill, and



spoke to him. Uncle Silas was standing near the window looking unspeakably grim. Madame was seated beside me, and an open bottle of ether, one of Uncle Silas's restoratives, on the table before me.

"Who's that — who's ill — is any one dead?" I cried.

At last I was relieved by long paroxysms of weeping. When I was sufficiently recovered, I was conveyed into my own room.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

## Lady Knollys' Carriage.

NEXT morning, it was Sunday, I lay in my bed in my dressing-gown, dull, apathetic, with all my limbs sore, and, as I thought, rheumatic, and feeling so ill that I did not care to speak or lift my head. My recollection of what had passed in Uncle Silas's room was utterly confused, and it seemed to me as if my poor father had been there and taken a share — I could not remember how — in the conference.

I was too exhausted and stupid to clear up this horrible muddle, and merely lay with my face toward the wall, motionless and silent, except for a great sigh every now and then.

Good Mary Quince was in the room — there was some comfort in that; but I felt quite worn out, and had rather she did not speak to me; and indeed for the time I felt absolutely indifferent as to whether I lived or died.

Cousin Monica this morning, at pleasant Elverston, all unconscious of my sad plight, proposed to Lady Mary Carysbroke and Lord Ilbury, her guests, to drive over to church at Feltram, and then pay us a visit at Bartram-Haugh, to which they readily agreed.

Accordingly, at about two o'clock, this pleasant party of three arrived at Bartram. They walked, having left the carriage to follow when the horses were fed, and Madame de la Rougierre, who was in my



uncle's room when little Giblets arrived to say that the party were in the parlour, whispered for a little with my uncle, who then said —

“Miss Maud Ruthyn has gone out to drive, but I shall be happy to see Lady Knollys here, if she will do me the favour to come up stairs, and see me for a few moments, and you can mention that I am very far from well.”

Madame followed him out upon the lobby, and added, holding him by the collar, and whispering earnestly in his ear —

“Bring hair ladysheep up by the back stairs — mind, the *back* stairs.”

And the next moment Madame entered my room, with long tiptoe steps, and looking, Mary Quince said, as if she were going to be hanged.

On entering she looked sharply round, and being satisfied of Mary Quince's presence, she turned the key in the door, and made some affectionate inquiries about me in a whisper; and then she stole to the window and peeped out, standing back some way; after which she came to my bedside, murmured some tender sentences, drew the curtain a little, and making some little fidgety adjustments about the room; among the rest she took the key from the lock, quietly, and put it into her pocket.

This was so odd a procedure that honest Mary Quince rose stoutly from her chair, pointing to the lock, with her frank little blue eyes fixed on Madame, and she whispered —

“Won't you put the key in the lock, please?”

“Oh, certainly, Mary Queence; but it is better it shall be locked, for I think her uncle he is coming to



see her, and I am sure she would be very much frightened, for he is very much displeased, don't you see? and we can tell him she is not well enough, or asleep, and so he will go away again, without any trouble."

I heard nothing of this, which was conducted in close whispers; and Mary, although she did not give Madame credit for caring whether I was frightened or not, and suspected her motives in everything, acquiesced grudgingly, fearing lest her alleged reason might possibly be the true one.

So Madame hovered about the door, uneasily; and of what went on elsewhere during that period Lady Knollys afterwards gave me the following account: —

"We were very much disappointed; but of course I was glad to see Silas, and your little hobgoblin butler led me upstairs to his room a different way, I think, from that I came before; but don't know the house of Bartram well enough to speak positively. I only know that I was conducted quite across his bedroom, which I had not seen on my former visit, and so into his sitting-room, where I found him.

"He seemed very glad to see me, came forward smiling — I disliked his smile always — with both hands out, and shook mine with more warmth than I ever remembered in his greeting before, and said —

"My dear, *dear* Monica, how *very* good of you — the very person I longed to see. I have been miserably ill, the sad consequence of still more miserable anxiety. Sit down, pray, for a moment."

"And he paid me some nice little French compliment in verse.

"And where is Maud?" said I.



“‘I think Maud is by this time about halfway to Elverston,’ said the old gentleman. ‘I persuaded her to take a drive, and advised a call there, which seemed to please her, so I conjecture she obeyed.’

“‘How *very* provoking!’ cried I.

“‘My poor Maud will be sadly disappointed, but you will console her by a visit — you have promised to come, and I shall try to make you comfortable. I shall be happier, Monica, with this proof of our perfect reconciliation. You won’t deny me?’

“‘Certainly not. I am only too glad to come,’ said I; ‘and I want to thank you, Silas.’

“‘For what?’ said he.

“‘For wishing to place Maud in my care. I am very much obliged to you.’

“‘I did not suggest it, I must say, Monica, with the least intention of obliging *you*,’ said Silas.

“‘I thought he was going to break into one of his ungracious moods.

“‘But I *am* obliged to you — very much obliged to you, Silas; and you shan’t refuse my thanks.’

• “‘I am happy, at all events, Monica, in having won your good-will; we learn at last that in the affections only are our capacities for happiness; and how true is St. Paul’s preference of love — the principle that abideth! The affections, dear Monica, are eternal; and being so, celestial, divine, and consequently happy, deriving happiness, and bestowing it.’

“‘I was always impatient of his or anybody else’s metaphysics; but I controlled myself, and only said, with my customary impudence —

“‘Well, dear Silas, and when do you wish me to come?’



“‘The earlier the better,’ said he.

“‘Lady Mary and Ilbury will be leaving me on Tuesday morning. I can come to you in the afternoon, if you think Tuesday a good day.’

“‘Thank you, dear Monica. I shall be, I trust, enlightened by that day as to my enemies’ plans. It is a humiliating confession, Monica, but I am past feeling that. It is quite possible that an execution may be sent into this house to-morrow, and an end of all my schemes. It is not likely, however — hardly possible — before three weeks, my attorney tells me. I shall hear from him to-morrow morning, and then I shall ask you to name a very early day. If we are to have an unmolested fortnight certain, you shall hear, and name your own day.’

“Then he asked me who had accompanied me, and lamented ever so much his not being able to go down to receive them, and he offered luncheon, with a sort of Ravenswood smile, and a shrug, and I declined, telling him that we had but a few minutes, and that my companions were walking in the grounds near the house.

“I asked whether Maud was likely to return soon?

“‘Certainly not before five o’clock.’ He thought we should probably meet her on our way back to Elverston; but could not be certain, as she might have changed her plans.

“So then came — no more remaining to be said — a very affectionate parting. I believe all about his legal dangers was strictly true. How he could, unless that horrid woman had deceived him, with so serene a countenance, tell me all those gross untruths about Maud, I can only admire.”



In the meantime, as I lay in my bed, Madame, gliding hither and thither, whispering sometimes, listening at others, I suddenly startled them both by saying —

"Whose carriage?"

"What carriage, dear?" inquired Quince, whose ears were not so sharp as mine.

Madame peeped from the window.

"'Tis the physician, Doctor Jolks. He is come to see your uncle, my dear," said Madame.

"But I hear a female voice," I said, sitting up.

"No, my dear. There is only the doctor," said Madame. "He is come to your uncle. I tell you he is getting out of his carriage," and she affected to watch the doctor's descent.

"The carriage is driving away!" I cried.

"Yes, it is draiving away," she echoed.

But I had sprung from my bed, and was looking over her shoulder, before she perceived me.

"It is Lady Knollys!" I screamed, seizing the window-frame to force it up, and, vainly struggling to open it, I cried —

"I'm here, Cousin Monica, for God's sake! Cousin Monica — Cousin Monica!"

"You are mad, Meess, go back," screamed Madame, exerting her superior strength to force me back.

But I saw deliverance and escape gliding away from my reach, and, strung to unnatural force by desperation, I pushed past her, and beat the window wildly with my hands, screaming —

"Save me — save me! Here, here, Monica, here! Cousin, Cousin, oh, save me!"

Madame had seized my wrists, and a wild struggle



was going on. A window-pane was broken, and I was shrieking to stop the carriage. The Frenchwoman looked black and haggard as a fury, as if she could have murdered me.

Nothing daunted — frantic — I screamed in my despair, seeing the carriage drive swiftly away — seeing Cousin Monica's bonnet, as she sat chatting with her *vis-à-vis*.

"Oh, oh, oh!" I shrieked, in vain and prolonged agony, as Madame, exerting her strength and matching her fury against my despair, forced me back in spite of my wild struggles, and pushed me sitting on the bed, where she held me fast, glaring in my face, and chuckling and panting over me.

I think I felt something of the despair of a lost spirit.

I remember the face of poor Mary Quince — its horror, its wonder — as she stood gaping into my face, over Madame's shoulder, and crying —

"What is it, Miss Maud? What is it, dear?" And turning fiercely on Madame, and striving to force her grasp from my wrists. "Are you hurting the child? Let her go — let her go."

"I *weel* let her go. Wat old fool are you, Mary Queence! She is mad, I think. She 'as lost hair head."

"Oh, Mary, cry from the window. Stop the carriage!" I cried.

Mary looked out, but there was by this time, of course, nothing in sight.

"Wy don't a you stop the carriage?" sneered Madame. "Call a the coachman and the postilion. W'ere is the footman? Bah! *elle a le cerveau mal timbré*."



"Oh, Mary, Mary, is it gone — is it gone? Is there nothing there?" cried I, rushing to the window, and turning to Madame, after a vain straining of my eyes, my face against the glass.

"Oh, cruel, cruel, wicked woman! why have you done this? What was it to you? Why do you persecute me? What good *can* you gain by my ruin?"

"Rueen! Par bleu! ma chère, you talk too fast. Did not a you see it, Mary Queence? It was the doctor's carriage, and Mrs. Jolks, and that eempudent faylow, young Jolks, staring up to the window, and Mademoiselle she come in soche shocking déshabille to show herself knocking at the window. 'Twould be very nice thing, Mary Queence, don't you think?"

I was sitting now on the bedside, crying in mere despair. I did not care to dispute or to resist. Oh, why had rescue come so near, only to prove that it could not reach me! So I went on crying, with a clasping of my hands and turning up of my eyes, in incoherent prayer. I was not thinking of Madame, or of Mary Quince, or any other person, only babbling my anguish and despair helplessly in the ear of heaven.

"I did not think there was soche fool. What *enfant gaté!* My dear cheaile, wat a can you *mean* by soche strange language and conduct? Wat for should a you weesh to display yourself in the window in soche 'orrible déshabille to the people in the doctor's coach?"

"It was *Cousin Knollys* — Cousin Knollys. Oh, Cousin Knollys! You're gone — you're gone — you're gone!"

"And if it was Lady Knollys' coach, there was certainly a coachman and a footman; and whoever has



the coach there was young gentlemen in it. If it was Lady Knollys' carriage it would 'av been *worse* than the doctor."

"It is no matter — it is all over. Oh, Cousin Monica, your poor Maud — where is she to turn? Is there no help?"

That evening Madame visited me again, in one of her sedate and moral moods. She found me dejected and passive, as she had left me.

"I think, Maud, there is news; but I am not certain."

I raised my head and looked at her wistfully.

"I think there is letter of *bad* news from the attorney in London."

"Oh!" I said, in a tone which I am sure implied the absolute indifference of dejection.

"But, my dear Maud, if 't be so, we shall go at once, you and me, to join Meess Milicent in France. La belle France! You weel like so moche! We shall be so gay. You cannot imagine there are such naice girl there. They all love a me so moche, you will be delight."

"How soon do we go?" I asked.

"I do not know. Bote I was to bring in a case of eau de Cologne that came this evening, and he laid down a letter and say: — 'The blow has descended, Madame! My niece must hold herself in readiness.' I said, 'For what, Monsieur?' *twice*; bote he did not answer. I am sure it is *un procès*. They 'av ruin him. Eh bien, my dear. I suppose we shall leave this triste place immediately. I am so rejoice. It appears to me *un cimetière*!"

"Yes, I should like to leave it," I said, sitting up,



with a great sigh and sunken eyes. It seemed to me that I had quite lost all sense of resentment towards Madame. A debility of feeling had supervened — the fatigue, I suppose, and prostration of the passions.

"I weel make excuse to go into his room again," said Madame; "and I weel endeavour to learn something more from him, and I weel come back again to you in half an hour."

She departed. But in half an hour did not return. I had a dull longing to leave Bartram-Haugh. For me, since the departure of poor Milly, it had grown like the haunt of evil spirits, and to escape on any terms from it was a blessing unspeakable.

Another half hour-passed, and another, and I grew insufferably feverish. I sent Mary Quince to the lobby to try and see Madame, who, I feared, was probably to-ing and fro-ing in and out of Uncle Silas's room.

Mary returned to tell me that she had seen old Wyat, who told her that she thought Madame had gone to her bed half an hour before.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

## A Sudden Departure.

"MARY," said I, "I am miserably anxious to hear what Madame may have to tell; she knows the state I am in, and she would not take so much trouble as to look in at my door to say a word. Did you hear what she told me?"

"No, Miss Maud," she answered, rising and drawing near.

"She thinks we are going to France immediately, and to leave this place perhaps for ever."

"Heaven be praised for that, if it be so, Miss," said Mary, with more energy than was common with her, "for there is no luck about it, and I don't expect to see you ever well or happy in it."

"You must take your candle, Mary, and make out her room, up stairs; I found it accidentally myself one evening."

"But Wyat won't let us up-stairs."

"Don't mind her, Mary; I tell you to go. You must try. I can't sleep till we hear."

"What direction is her room in, Miss?" asked Mary.

"Somewhere in *that* direction, Mary," I answered, pointing. "I cannot describe the turns; but I think you will find it if you go along the great passage to your left, on getting to the top of the stairs, till you come to the cross galleries, and then turn to your left,



and when you have passed four, or perhaps five doors, you must be very near it, and I am sure she will hear if you call."

"But will she tell me — she is such a rum un, Miss?" suggested Mary.

"Tell her exactly what I have said to you, and when she learns that you already know as much as I do, she may — unless, indeed, she wishes to torture me. If she won't, perhaps at least you can persuade her to come to me for a moment. Try, dear Mary; we can but fail."

"Will you be very lonely, Miss, while I am away?" asked Mary, uneasily, as she lighted her candle.

"I can't help it, Mary. Go. I think if I heard we were going, I could almost get up and dance and sing. I can't bear this dreadful uncertainty any longer."

"If old Wyat is outside, I'll come back and wait here a bit, till she's out o' the way," said Mary; "and, anyhow, I'll make all the haste I can. The drops and the sal-volatile is here, Miss, by your hand."

And with an anxious look at me, she made her exit, softly, and did not immediately return, by which I concluded that she had found the way clear, and had gained the upper story without interruption.

This little anxiety ended, its subsidence was followed by a sense of loneliness, and with it, of vague insecurity, which increased at last to such a pitch, that I wondered at my own madness in sending my companion away and at last my terrors so grew, that I drew back into the furthest corner of the bed, with my



shoulders to the wall, and my bed-clothes huddled about me, with only a point open to peep at.

At last the door opened gently.

"Who's there?" I cried, in extremity of horror, expecting I knew not whom.

"Me, Miss," whispered Mary Quince, to my unutterable relief; and with her candle flared, and a wild and pallid face, Mary Quince glided into the room, locking the door as she entered.

I do not know how it was, but I found myself holding Mary fast with both my hands as we stood side by side on the floor.

"Mary, you are terrified; for God's sake, what is the matter?" I cried.

"No, Miss," said Mary, faintly; "not much."

"I see it in your face. What is it?"

"Let me sit down, Miss. I'll tell you what I saw; only I'm just a bit queerish."

Mary sat down by my bed.

"Get in, Miss, you'll take cold. Get into bed, and I'll tell you. It is not much."

I did get into bed, and gazing on Mary's frightened face, I felt a corresponding horror.

"For mercy's sake, Mary, say what it is?"

So again assuring me "it was not much," she gave me in a somewhat diffuse and entangled narrative the following facts: —

On closing my door, she raised her candle above her head and surveyed the lobby, and seeing no one there, she ascended the stairs swiftly. She passed along the great gallery to the left, and paused a moment at the cross gallery, and then recollected my directions clearly, and followed the passage to the right.



There are doors at each side, and she had forgotten to ask me at which Madame's was. She opened several. In one room she was frightened by a bat, which had very nearly put her candle out. She went on a little, paused, and began to lose heart in the dismal solitude, when on a sudden, a few doors further on, she thought she heard Madame's voice.

She said that she knocked at the door, but receiving no answer, and hearing Madame still talking within, she opened it.

There was a candle on the chimney-piece, and another in a stable lantern near the window. Madame was conversing volubly on the hearth, with her face toward the window, the entire frame of which had been taken from its place; Dickon Hawkes, the Zamiel of the wooden leg, was supporting it with one hand, as it leaned imperfectly against the angle of the recess. There was a third figure standing, buttoned up in a surtout, with a bundle of tools under his arm, like a glazier, and, with a silent thrill of fear, she distinctly recognised the features as those of Dudley Ruthyn.

"'Twas him, Miss, so sure as I sit here! Well, like that, they were as mute as mice; three pairs of eyes were on me. I don't know what made me so study like, but som'at told me I should not make as though I knew any but Madame; and so I made a courtesy, as well as I could, and I said might I speak a word wi' ye, please, on the lobby.

"Mr. Dudley was making belief be this time to look out at window, wi' his back to me, and I kept looking straight on Madame, and she said — 'They're mendin' my broken glass, Mary,' walking between them and me, and coming close up to me very quick;



and so she marched me backward out o' the door, prating all the time.

"When we were on the lobby, she took my candle from my hand, shutting the door behind her, and she held the light a bit behind her ear; so 'twas full on my face, as she looked sharp into it; and, after a bit, she said again, in her queer lingo — there was two panes broke in her room, and men sent for to mend it.

"I was awful frightened when I saw Mr. Dudley, for I could not believe any such thing before, and I don't know how I could look her in the face as I did and not show it. I was as smooth and cool as yonder chimney-piece, and she has an awful evil eye to stan' against; but I never flinched, and I think she's puzzled, for as cunning as she is, whether I believe all she said, or knowed 'twas a pack o' stories. So I told her your message, and she said she had not heard another word since; but she did believe we had not many more days here, and would tell you if she heard to-night, when she brought his soup to your uncle, in half an hour's time."

I asked her, so soon as I could speak, whether she was perfectly certain as to the fact that the man in the surtout was Dudley, and she made answer —

"I'd swear to him on that Bible, Miss."

So far from any longer wishing Madame's return that night, I trembled at the idea of it. Who could tell who might enter the room with her, when the door opened to admit her?

Dudley, so soon as he recovered the surprise, had turned about, evidently anxious to prevent recognition; Dickon Hawkes stood glowering at her. Both might



have hope of escaping recognition in the imperfect light, for the candle on the chimney-piece was flaring in the air, and the light from the lantern fell in spots, and was confusing.

What could that ruffian, Hawkes, be doing in the house? Why was Dudley there? Could a more ominous combination be imagined? I puzzled my distracted head over all Mary Quince's details, but could make nothing of their occupation. I know of nothing so terrifying as this kind of perpetual puzzling over ominous problems.

You may imagine how the long hours of that night passed, and how my heart beat at every fancied sound outside my door.

But morning came, and with its light some reassurance. Early, Madame de la Rougierre made her appearance; she searched my eyes darkly and shrewdly, but made no allusion to Mary Quince's visit. Perhaps she expected some question from me, and, hearing none, thought it as well to leave the subject at rest.

She had merely come in to say that she had heard nothing since, but was now going to make my uncle's chocolate, and that so soon as her interview was ended she would see me again, and let me hear anything she should have gleaned.

In a little while a knock came to my door, and Mary Quince was ordered by old Wyat into my uncle's room. She returned flushed, in a huge fuss, to say that I was to be up and dressed for a journey in half an hour, and to go straight, when dressed, to my uncle's room.

It was good news; at the same time it was a shock.



I was glad. I was stunned. I jumped out of bed, and set about my toilet with an energy quite new to me. Good Mary Quince was busily packing my boxes, and consulting as to what I should take with me, and what not.

Was Mary Quince to accompany me? He had not said a word on that point; and I feared, from his silence, she was to remain. There was comfort, however, in this — that the separation would not be for long; I felt confident of that; and I was about to join Milly, whom I loved better than I could have believed before our separation; but whatsoever the conditions might be, it was an indescribable relief to have done with Bartram-Haugh, and leave behind me its sinister lines of circumvallation; its haunted recesses, and the awful spectres that had lately appeared within its walls.

I stood too much in awe of my uncle to fail in presenting myself punctually at the close of the half hour. I entered his sitting-room under the shadow of sour old Wyat's high-cauled cap; she closed the door behind me, and the conference commenced.

Madame de la Rougierre sat there, dressed and draped for a journey, and with a thick black lace veil on. My uncle rose, gaunt and venerable, and with a harsh and severe countenance. He did not offer his hand; he made me a kind of bow, more of repulsion than of respect. He remained in a standing position, supporting his crooked frame by his hand, which he leaned on a despatch-box; he glared on me steadily with his wild, phosphoric eyes, from under the dark brows I have described to you, now corrugated in lines indescribably stern.



"You shall join my daughter at the Pension, in France; Madame de la Rougierre shall accompany you," said my uncle, delivering his directions with the stern monotony and the measured pauses of a person dictating an important despatch to a secretary. "Old Mrs. Quince shall follow with me, or, if alone, in a week. You shall pass to-night in London; to-morrow night you proceed thence to Dover, and cross by the mail-packet. You shall now sit down and write a letter to your Cousin Monica Knollys, which I will first read and then despatch. To-morrow you shall write a note to Lady Knollys, from *London*, telling her how you have got over so much of your journey, and that you cannot write from Dover as you must instantly start by the packet on reaching it, and that until my affairs are a little settled, you cannot write to her from France, as it is of high importance to my safety that no clue should exist as to our address. Intelligence, however, shall reach her through my attorneys, Archer and Sleigh, and I trust we shall soon return. You will, please, submit that latter note to Madame de la Rougierre, who has my directions to see that it contains no *libels* upon my character. Now, sit down."

So with those unpleasant words tingling in my ears, I obeyed.

"*Write*," said he, when I was duly placed. "You shall convey the substance of what I say in your own language. The imminent danger this morning announced of an execution — remember the word," and he spelled it for me — "being put into this house either this afternoon or to-morrow, compels me to anticipate my plans, and despatch you for France this day. That you are starting with an attendant." Here an uneasy



movement from Madame, whose dignity was perhaps excited. "An *attendant*," he repeated, with a discordant emphasis; "and you can, if you please — but I don't *solicit* that justice — say that you have been as kindly treated here as my unfortunate circumstances would permit. That is all. You have just fifteen minutes to write. Begin."

I wrote accordingly. My hysterical state had made me far less combative than I might have proved some months since, for there was much that was insulting as well as formidable in his manner. I completed my letter, however, to his satisfaction in the prescribed time, and he said, as he laid it and its envelope on the table —

"Please to remember that this lady is not your attendant only, but that she has authority to direct every detail respecting your journey, and will make all the necessary payments on the way. You will, please, then, implicitly to comply with her directions. The carriage awaits you at the hall-door."

Having thus spoken, with another grim bow, and

"I wish you a safe and pleasant journey,"  
He receded a step or two, and I, with an undefinable kind of melancholy, though also with a sense of relief, withdrew.

My letter, I afterwards found, reached Lady Knollys, accompanied by one from Uncle Silas, who said —  
"Dear Maud apprizes me that she has written to tell you something of our movements. A sudden crisis in my miserable affairs compels a break-up as sudden here. Maud joins my daughter at the Pension, in France. I purposely omit the address, because I mean to reside in its vicinity until this storm shall have blown over;



and as the consequences of some of my unhappy entanglements might pursue me even there, I must only for the present spare you the pain and trouble of keeping a secret. I am sure for some little time you will excuse the girl's silence; in the meantime you shall hear of them, and, perhaps, circuitously from me. Our dear Maud started this morning *en route* for her destination, very sorry, as am I, that she could not enjoy first a flying visit to Elverston; but in high spirits, notwithstanding, at the new life and sights before her."

At the door my beloved old friend, Mary Quince, awaited me —

"Am I going with you, Miss Maud?"

I burst into tears and clasped her in my arms.

"I'm not," said Mary, very sorrowfully; "and I never was from you yet, Miss, since you was'nt the length of my arm."

And kind old Mary began to cry with me.

"Bote you are coming in few days, Mary Quince," expostulated Madame. "I wonder you are soche fool. What is two, three days. Bah! nonsense, girl."

Another farewell to poor Mary Quince, quite bewildered at the suddenness of her bereavement. A serious and tremulous bow from our little old butler on the steps. Madame bawling through the open window to the driver to make good speed, and remember that we had but nineteen minutes to reach the station. Away we went. Old Crowle's iron *grille* rolled back before us. I looked on the receding landscape, the giant trees, the palatial, time-stained mansion. A strange conflict of feelings, sweet and bitter, rose and mingled in the reverie. Had I been too hard and suspicious with the



inhabitants of that old house of my family? Was my uncle *justly* indignant? Was I ever again to know such pleasant rambles as some of those I had enjoyed with dear Millicent through the wild and beautiful woodlands I was leaving behind me? And there, with my latest glimpse of the front of Bartram-Haugh, I beheld dear old Mary Quince gazing after us. Again my tears flowed. I waved my handkerchief from the window; and now the park wall hid all from view, and at a great pace, through the steep wooded glen, with the rocky and precipitous character of a ravine, we glided; and when the road next emerged, Bartram-Haugh was a misty mass of forest and chimneys, slope and hollow, and we within a few minutes of the station.



## CHAPTER XXV.

## The Journey.

WAITING for the train, as we stood upon the platform, I looked back again toward the wooded uplands of Bartram; and far behind, the fine range of mountains, azure and soft in the distance, beyond which lay beloved old Knowl, and my lost father and mother, and the scenes of my childhood, never embittered except by the sibyl who sat beside me.

Under happier circumstances I should have been, at my then early age, quite wild with pleasurable excitement on entering London for the first time. But black Care sat by me, with her pale hand in mine: a voice of fear and warning, whose words I could not catch, was always in my ear. We drove through London, amid the glare of lamps, toward the West-end, and for a little while the sense of novelty and curiosity overcame my despondency, and I peeped eagerly from the window; while Madame, who was in high good-humour, spite of the fatigues of our long railway flight, screeched scraps of topographic information in my ear; for London was a picture-book in which she was well read.

"That is Euston-square, my dear — Russell-square. Here is Oxford-street — Haymarket. See, there is the Opera House — hair Majesty's theatre. See all the carriages waiting;" and so on, till we reached at length a narrow street, which she told me was off Piccadilly,



where we drew up before a private house, as it seemed to me — a family hotel — and I was glad to be at rest for the night.

Fatigued with the peculiar fatigue of railway travelling, dusty, a little chilly, with eyes aching and wearied, I ascended the stairs silently, our garrulous and bustling landlady leading the way, and telling her oft-told story of the house, its noble owner in old time, and how those fine drawing-rooms were taken every year during the session by the Bishop of Rochet-on-Copeley, and at last into our double-bedded room.

I would fain have been alone, but I was too tired and dejected to care very much for anything.

At tea, Madame expanded in spirit, like a giant refreshed, and chatted and sang; and at last, seeing that I was nodding, advised my going to bed, while she ran across the street to see "her dear old friend, Mademoiselle St. Eloi, who was sure to be up, and would be offended if she failed to make her ever so short a call."

I cared little what she did, and was glad to be rid of her even for a short time, and was soon fast asleep.

I saw her, I know not how much later, poking about the room, like a figure in a dream, and taking off her things.

She had her breakfast in bed next morning, and I was, to my comfort, left to take mine in solitary possession of our sitting-room; where I began to wonder how little annoyance I had as yet suffered from her company, and began to speculate upon the chances of my making the journey with tolerable comfort.

Our hostess gave me five minutes of her valuable



time. Her talk ran chiefly upon nuns and convents, and her old acquaintance with Madame; and it seemed to me that she had at one time driven a kind of trade, no doubt profitable enough, in escorting young ladies to establishments on the Continent; and although I did not then quite understand the tone in which she spoke to me, I often thought afterwards that Madame had represented me as a young person destined for the holy vocation of the veil.

When she was gone I sat listlessly looking out of the window, and saw some chance equipages drive by, and now and then a fashionable pedestrian; and wondered if this quiet thoroughfare could really be one of the arteries so near the heart of the tumultuous capital.

I think my nervous vitality must have burnt very low just then, for I felt perfectly indifferent about all the novelty and world of wonders beyond, and should have hated to leave the dull tranquillity of my window for an excursion through the splendours of the unseen streets and palaces that surrounded me.

It was one o'clock before Madame joined me; and finding me in this dull mood, she did not press me to accompany her in her drive, no doubt well pleased to be rid of me.

After tea that evening, as we sat alone in our room, she entertained me with some very odd conversation — at the time unintelligible — but which acquired a tolerably distinct meaning from the events that followed.

Two or three times that day Madame appeared to me on the point of saying something of grave import, as she scanned me with her bleak wicked stare.



It was a peculiarity of hers, that whenever she was pressed upon by an anxiety that really troubled her, her countenance did not look sad or solicitous as other people's would, but simply wicked. Her great gaunt mouth was compressed and drawn down firmly at the corners, and her eyes glared with a dismal scowl.

At last she said suddenly —

“Are you ever grateful, Maud?”

“I hope so, Madame,” I answered.

“And how do you show your gratitude? For instance, would a you do great deal for a person who would run *risque* for your sake?”

It struck me all at once that she was sounding me about poor Meg Hawkes, whose fidelity, notwithstanding the treason or cowardice of her lover, Tom Brice, I never doubted; and I grew at once wary and reserved.

“I know of no opportunity, thank Heaven, for any such service, Madame. How can anyone serve me at present, by themselves incurring danger? What do you mean?”

“Do you like, for example, to go to that French Pension? Would you not like better some other arrangement?”

“Of course there are other arrangements I should like better; but I see no use in talking of them; they are not to be,” I answered.

“What other arrangements do you mean, my dear cheaile?” inquired Madame. “You mean, I suppose, you would like better to go to Lady Knollys.”

“My uncle does not choose it at present; and except with his consent nothing can be done.”



"He weel never consent, dear cheaile."

"But he *has* consented — not immediately indeed, but in a short time, when his affairs are settled."

"*Lanternes!* They will never be settle," said Madame.

"At all events, for the present I am to go to France. Milly seems very happy, and I dare say I shall like it too. I am very glad to leave Bartram-Haugh, at all events."

"But your uncle weel bring you back there," said Madame, drily.

"It is doubtful whether he will ever return to Bartram himself," I said.

"Ah," said Madame, with a long-drawn, nasal intonation, "you theenk I hate you. You are quaiter wrong, my dear Maud. I am, on the contrary, very much interested for you — I am, I assure you, dear a cheaile."

And she laid her great hand, with joints misshapen by old chilblains, upon the back of mine. I looked up in her face. She was not smiling. On the contrary, her wide mouth was drawn down at the corners ruefully, as before, and she gazed on my face with a scowl from her abysmal eyes.

I used to think the flare of that irony which lighted her face so often immeasurably worse than any other expression she could assume; but this lack-lustre stare and dismal collapse of feature was more wicked still.

"Suppose I should bring you to Lady Knollys, and place you in her charge, what would a you do then for poor Madame?" said this dark spectre.

I was inwardly startled at these words. I looked into her unsearchable face, but could draw thence



nothing but fear. Had she made the same overture only two days since, I think I would have offered her half my fortune. But circumstances were altered. I was no longer in the panic of despair. The lesson I had received from Tom Brice was fresh in my mind, and my profound distrust of her was uppermost. I saw before me only a tempter and betrayer, and said —

“Do you mean to imply, Madame, that my guardian is not to be trusted, and that I ought to make my escape from him, and that you are really willing to aid me in doing so?”

This, you see, was turning the tables upon her. I looked her steadily in the face as I spoke. She returned my gaze with a strange stare and a gape, which haunted me long after; and it seemed as we sat in utter silence that each was rather horribly fascinated by the other's gaze.

At last she shut her mouth sternly, and eyed me with a more determined and meaning scowl, and then said in a low tone —

“I believe, Maud, that you are a cunning and wicked little thing.”

“Wisdom is not cunning, Madame; nor is it wicked to ask your meaning in explicit language,” I replied.

“And so, you clever cheaile, we two sit here, playing at a game of chess, over this little table, to decide which shall destroy the other — is it not so?”

“I will not allow you to destroy me,” I retorted, with a sudden flash.

Madame stood up, and rubbed her mouth with her open hand. She looked to me like some evil being seen in a dream. I was frightened.



"You are going to hurt me!" I ejaculated, scarce knowing what I said.

"If I were, you deserve it. You are very malicious, *ma chère*; or, it may be, only very stupid."

A knock came to the door.

"Come in," I cried, with a glad sense of relief.

A maid entered.

"A letter, please'm," she said, handing it to me.

"For *me*," snarled Madame, snatching it.

I had seen my uncle's hand and the Feltram post-mark.

Madame broke the seal, and read. It seemed but a word, for she turned it about after the first momentary glance, and examined the interior of the envelope, and then returned to the line she had already read.

She folded the letter again, drawing her nails in a sharp pinch along the creases, as she stared in a blank, hesitating way at me.

"You stupid little ingrate, I am employ by Monsieur Ruthyn, and of course I am faithful to my employer. I do not want to talk to you. *There*, you may read that."

She jerked the letter before me on the table. It contained but these words —

"Bartram-Haugh,

"30th January, 1845.

"MY DEAR MADAME,

"Be so good as to take the half-past eight o'clock train to *Dover* to-night. Beds are prepared.

"Yours very truly,

"SILAS RUTHYN."



I cannot say what it was in this short advice that struck me with fear. Was it the thick line beneath the word "Dover" that was so uncalled for, and gave me a faint but terrible sense of something preconcerted?

I said to Madame —

"Why is 'Dover' underlined?"

"I do not know, little fool, no more than you. How can I tell what is passing in your uncle's head when he make that a mark?"

"Has it not a meaning, Madame?"

"How can you talk like that?" she answered, more in her old way. "You are either mocking of me, or you are becoming truly a fool!"

She rang the bell, called for our bill, saw our hostess; while I made a few hasty preparations in my room.

"You need not look after the trunks — they will follow us all right. Let us go, cheaile — we 'av half an hour only to reach the train."

No one ever fussed like Madame when occasion offered. There was a cab at the door, into which she hurried me. I assumed that she would give all needful directions, and leaned back, very weary and sleepy already, though it was so early, listening to her farewell screamed from the cab-step, and seeing her black cloak flitting and flapping this way and that, like the wings of a raven disturbed over its prey.

In she got, and away we drove through a glare of lamps, and shop-windows, still open; gas everywhere, and cabs, busses, and carriages, still thundering through the streets. I was too tired and too depressed to look



at those things. Madame, on the contrary, had her head out of the window till we reached the station.

"Where are the rest of the boxes?" I asked, as Madame placed me in charge of her box and my bag in the office of the terminus.

"They will follow with Boots in another cab, and will come safe with us in this train. Mind those two, we weel bring in the carriage with us."

So into a carriage we got; in came Madame's box and my bag; Madame stood at the door, and, I think, frightened away intending passengers, by her size and shrillness.

At last the bell rang her into her place, the door clapt, the whistle sounded, and we were off.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

## Our Bed-Chamber.

I HAD passed a miserable night, and, indeed, for many nights had not had my due proportion of sleep. Still I sometimes fancy that I may have swallowed something in my tea that helped to make me so irresistibly drowsy. It was a very dark night. No moon, and the stars soon hid by the gathering clouds. Madame sat silent, and ruminating in her place, with her rugs about her. I in my corner similarly enveloped I tried to keep awake. Madame plainly thought I was asleep already, for she stole a leather flask from her pocket, and applied it to her lips, causing an aroma of brandy.

But it was vain struggling against the influence that was stealing over me, and I was soon in a profound and dreamless slumber.

Madame awoke me at last, in a huge fuss. She had got out all our things and hurried them away to a close carriage which was awaiting us. It was still dark and starless. We got along the platform, I half asleep, the porter carrying our rugs, by the glare of a pair of gas jets in the wall, and out by a small door at the end.

I remember that Madame, contrary to her wont, gave the man some money. By the puzzling light of the carriage lamps we got in and took our seats.

"Go on," screamed Madame, and drew up the



window with a great chuck, and we were enclosed in dark and silence, the most favourable conditions for thought.

My sleep had not restored me as it might; I felt feverish, fatigued, and still very drowsy, though unable to sleep as I had done.

I dozed by fits and starts, and lay awake, or half awake sometimes, not thinking but in a way imagining what kind of a place Dover would be; but too tired and listless to ask Madame any questions, and merely seeing the hedges, gray in the lamp-light, glide backward into darkness, as I leaned back.

We turned off the main road, at right angles, and drew up.

"Get down and poosh it, it is open," screamed Madame from the window.

A gate, I suppose, was thus passed, for when we resumed our brisk trot, Madame bawled across the carriage —

"We are now in the 'otel grounds."

And so all again was darkness and silence, and I fell into another doze, from which, on waking, I found that we had come to a standstill, and Madame was standing on the low step of an open door, paying the driver. She, herself, pulled her box and the bag in. I was too tired to care what had become of the rest of our luggage.

I descended, glancing to the right and left, but there was nothing visible but a patch of light from the lamps on a paved ground and on the wall.

We stepped into the hall or vestibule, and Madame shut the door, and I thought I heard the key turn in it. We were in total darkness.



"Where are the lights, Madame — where are the people?" I asked, more awake than I had been.

"'Tis pass three o'clock, cheaile, bote there is always light here." She was groping at the side; and in a moment more lighted a lucifer match, and so a bed-room candle.

We were in a flagged lobby, under an archway at the right, and at the left of which opened long flagged passages, lost in darkness; a winding stair, barely wide enough to admit Madame, dragging her box, led upward under a doorway, in a corner at the right.

"Come, dear cheaile, take a your bag; don't mind the rugs, they are safe enough."

"But where are we to go? There is no one!" I said, looking round in wonder. It certainly was a strange reception at a hotel.

"Never mind, my dear cheaile. They know me here, and I have always the same room ready when I write for it. Follow me quaitely."

So she mounted, carrying the candle. The stair was steep, and the march long. We halted at the second landing, and entered a gaunt, grimy passage. All the way up we had not heard a single sound of life, nor seen a human being, nor so much as passed a gaslight.

"Voila! here 'tis, my dear old room. Enter, dearest Maud."

And so I did. The room was large and lofty, but shabby and dismal. There was a tall four-post bed, with its foot beside the window, hung with dark-green curtains, of some plush or velvet texture, that looked like a dusty pall. The remaining furniture was scant and old, and a ravelled square of threadbare carpet



covered a patch of floor at the bed-side. The room was grim and large, and had a cold, vault-like atmosphere, as if long uninhabited; but there were cinders in the grate and under it. The imperfect light of our mutton-fat candle made all this look still more comfortless.

Madame placed the candle on the chimney-piece, locked the door, and put the key in her pocket.

"I always do so in '*otel*,'" said she, with a wink at me.

And then with a long "ha!" expressive of fatigue and relief, she threw herself into a chair.

"So 'ere we are at last!" said she; "I'm glad. *There's* your bed, Maud. *Mine* is in the dressing-room."

She took the candle, and I went in with her. A shabby press-bed, a chair, and table, were all its furniture; it was rather a closet than a dressing-room, and had no door except that through which we had entered. So we returned, and very tired, wondering, I sat down on the side of my bed, and yawned.

"I hope they will call us in time for the packet," I said.

"Oh, yes, they never fail," she answered, looking steadfastly on her box, which she was diligently uncording.

Uninviting as was my bed I was longing to lie down in it; and having made those ablutions which our journey rendered necessary, I at length lay down, having first religiously stuck my talismanic pin, with the head of sealing-wax, into the bolster.

Nothing escaped the restless eye of Madame.

"Wat is that, dear cheaile?" she inquired, drawing



near and scrutinizing the head of the gipsy charm, which showed like a little ladybird newly lighted on the sheet.

"Nothing — a charm — folly. Pray, Madame, allow me to go to sleep."

So, with another look and a little twiddle between her finger and thumb, she seemed satisfied; but, unhappily for me, she did not seem at all sleepy. She busied herself in unpacking and displaying over the back of the chair a whole series of London purchases. Silk dresses, a shawl, a sort of lace demi-coiffure, then in vogue, and a variety of other articles.

The vainest and most slammakin of women. The merest slut at home, a milliner's lay figure out of doors. She had one square foot of looking-glass upon the chimney-piece, and therein tried effects, and conjured up grotesque simpers upon her sinister and weary face.

I knew that the sure way to prolong this worry was to express my uneasiness under it, so I bore it as quietly as I could; and at last fell fast asleep with the gaunt image of Madame, with a festoon of gray silk with a cerise stripe, pinched up in her finger and thumb, and smiling over her shoulder across it into the little shaving-glass that stood on the chimney.

I awoke suddenly in the morning, and sat up in my bed, having for a moment forgotten all about our travelling. A moment more, however, brought all back again.

"Are we in time, Madame?"

"For the packet?" she inquired, with one of her charming smiles, and cutting a caper on the floor. "To



be sure; you don't suppose they would forget. We have two hours yet to wait."

"Can we see the sea from the window?"

"No, dearest cheaile; you will see't time enough."

"I'd like to get up," I said.

"Time enough, my dear Maud; you are fatigue; are you sure you feel quite well?"

"Well enough to get up; I should be better, I think, out of bed."

"There is no hurry, you know; you need not even go by the next packet. Your uncle, he tell me, I may use my discretion."

"Is there any water?"

"They will bring some."

"Please, Madame, ring the bell."

She pulled it with alacrity. I afterwards learnt that it did not ring.

"What has become of my gipsy pin?" I demanded, with an unaccountable sinking of the heart.

Oh! the little pin with the red top? maybe it 'as fall on the ground; we weel find when you get up."

I suspected that she had taken it merely to spite me. It would have been quite the thing she would have liked. I cannot describe to you how the loss of this little "charm" depressed and excited me. I searched the bed; I turned over all the bed-clothes; I searched in and outside; at last I gave it up.

"How odious!" I cried; "somebody has stolen it merely to vex me."

And, like a fool as I was, I threw myself on my face on the bed and wept, partly in anger, partly in dismay.

After a time, however, this blew over. I had a



hope of recovering it. If Madame had stolen it, it would turn up yet. But in the meantime its disappearance troubled me like an omen.

"I am afraid, my dear cheaile, you are not very well. It is really very odd you should make such fuss about a pin! Nobody would believe! Do you not theenk it would be good plan to take a your breakfast in your bed?"

She continued to urge this point for some time. At last, however, having by this time quite recovered my self-command, and resolved to preserve ostensibly fair terms with Madame, who could contribute so essentially to make me wretched during the rest of my journey, and possibly to prejudice me very seriously on my arrival, I said quietly —

"Well, Madame, I know it is very silly; but I had kept that foolish little pin so long and so carefully, that I had grown quite fond of it; but I suppose it is lost, and I must content myself, though I cannot laugh as you do. So I will get up now, and dress."

"I think you will do well to get all the repose you can," answered Madame; "but as you please," she added, observing that I was getting up.

So soon as I had got some of my things on I said —

"Is there a pretty view from the window?"

"No," said Madame.

I looked out and saw a dreary quadrangle of cut stone; in one side of which my window was placed. As I looked a dream rose up before me.

"This hotel," I said, in a puzzled way. "Is it a hotel? Why this is just like — it is the inner court of Bartram-Haugh!"

Madame clapped her large hands together, made a



fantastic *chassé* on the floor, burst into a great nasal laugh like the scream of a parrot, and then said —

“Well, dearest Maud, is not clever trick?”

I was so utterly confounded that I could only stare about me in stupid silence, a spectacle which renewed Madame's peals of laughter.

“We are at Bartram-Haugh!” I repeated, in utter consternation. “How was this done?”

I had no reply but shrieks of laughter, and one of those Walpurgis dances, in which she excelled.

“It is a mistake — is it? *What* is it?”

“All a mistake, of course. Bartram-Haugh, it is so like Dover, as all philosophers know.”

I sat down in total silence, looking out into the deep and dark enclosure, and trying to comprehend the reality and the meaning of all this.

“Well, Madame, I suppose you will be able to satisfy my uncle of your fidelity and intelligence. But to me it seems that his money has been ill spent, and his directions anything but well observed.”

“Ah, ha! Never mind; I think he will forgive me,” laughed Madame.

Her tone frightened me. I began to think with a vague but overpowering sense of danger that she had acted under the Machiavelian directions of her superior.

“You have brought me back, then, by my uncle's orders.”

“Did I say so?”

“No; but what you have said can have no other meaning, though I can't believe it. And why have I been brought here. What is the object of all this duplicity and trick? I *will* know. It is not possible



that my uncle, a gentleman and a kinsman, can be privy to so disreputable a manœuvre."

"First you will eat your breakfast, dear Maud; next you can tell your story to your uncle, Monsieur Ruthyn; and then you shall hear what he thinks of my so terrible misconduct. What nonsense, cheaile! Can you not think how many things may 'appen to change a your uncle's plans? Is he not in danger to be arrest? Bah! You are cheaile still; you cannot have intelligence more than a cheaile. Dress yourself, and I will order breakfast."

I could not comprehend the strategy which had been practised on me. Why had I been so shamelessly deceived. If it were decided that I should remain here, for what imaginable reason had I been sent so far on my journey to France? Why had I been conveyed back with such mystery? Why was I removed to this uncomfortable and desolate room, on the same floor with the apartment in which Charke had met his death, and with no window commanding the front of the house, and no view but the deep and weed-choked court, that looked like a deserted churchyard in a city?

"I suppose I may go to my own room?" I said.

"Not to-day, my dear cheaile, for it was all disarrange when we go 'way; 'twill be ready again in two three days."

"Where is Mary Quince?" I asked.

"Mary Quince! — she has follow us to France?" said Madame, making what in Ireland they call a bull.

"They are not sure where they will go or what will do for day or two more. I will go and get breakfast. Adieu for a moment."

Madame was out of the door as she said this; and I thought I heard the key turn in the lock.



## CHAPTER XXVII.

A Well-known Face looks in.

You who have never experienced it can have no idea how angry and frightened you become under the sinister insult of being locked into a room, as on trying the door I found I was.

The key was in the lock; I could see it through the hole. I called after Madame, I shook at the solid oak door, beat upon it with my hands, kicked it — but all to no purpose.

I rushed into the next room, forgetting, if indeed I had observed it, that there was no door from it upon the gallery. I turned round in an angry and dismayed perplexity, and, like prisoners in romances, examined the windows.

I was shocked and affrighted on discovering in reality what they occasionally find — a series of iron bars crossing the window! They were firmly secured in the oak woodwork of the window frame, and each window was, besides, so compactly screwed down that it could not open. This bedroom was converted into a prison — a momentary hope flashed on me — perhaps all the windows were secured alike? But it was no such thing: these gaol-like precautions were confined to the windows to which I had access.

For a few minutes I felt quite distracted; but I be-thought me that I must now, if ever, control my terrors and exert whatever faculties I possessed.



I stood upon a chair and examined the oakwork. I thought I detected marks of new chiselling here and there. The screws, too, looked new; and they and the scars on the wood-work were freshly smeared over with some coloured stuff by way of disguise.

While I was making these observations, I heard the key stealthily stirred. I suspect that Madame wished to surprise me. Her approaching step, indeed, was seldom audible. She had the soft tread of the feline tribe.

I was standing in the centre of the room confronting her when she entered.

"Why did you lock the door, Madame?" I demanded.

She slipped in suddenly, with an insidious smirk, and locked the door hastily.

"Hish!" whispered Madame, raising her broad palm, and then screwing in her cheeks, she made an ogle over her shoulder in the direction of the passage.

"Hish! be quiate, cheaile, weel you, and I weel tale you everything presently."

She paused, with her ear laid to the door.

"Now, I can speak, ma chère; I weel tale a you there is bailiff in the house, two, three, four soche impertinent fallows! They have another as bad as themselves to make a leest of the furniture, we most keep them out of these rooms, dear Maud."

"You left the key in the door on the outside?" I retorted; "that was not to keep them out, but me in, Madame."

"*Deed* I leave a the key in the door?" ejaculated Madame, with both hands raised, and such a genuine look of consternation as for a moment shook me.



It was the nature of this woman's deceptions that they often puzzled, though they seldom convinced me.

"I re-ally think, Maud, all those so frequent changes and excit-e-ments they weel overturn my poor head."

"And the windows are secured with iron bars — what are they for?" I whispered sternly, pointing with my finger at these grim securities.

"That is for more a than forty 'years, when Sir Phileep Aylmer was to reside here, and had this room for his children's nursery, and was afraid they should fall out."

"But if you look you will find these bars have been put here very recently: the screws and marks are quite new."

"*Eendeed!*" ejaculated Madame, with prolonged emphasis, in precisely the same consternation. "Why, my dear, they told a me down stair what I have tell a you, when I ask the reason! Late a me see."

And Madame mounted on a chair, and made her scrutiny with much curiosity; but could not agree with me as to the very recent date of the carpentry.

There is nothing, I think, so exasperating as that sort of falsehood which affects not to see what is quite palpable.

"Do you mean to say, Madame, that you really think those chisellings and screws are forty years old?"

"How can I tell, cheaile? What does signify whether it is forty or only fourteen years? Bah! we 'av other theeng to theenk about. Those villain men! I am glad to see bar and bolt, and lock and key, at least, to our room, to keep soche faylows out!"



At that moment a knock came to the door, and Madame's nasal, "in moment," answered promptly, and she opened the door stealthily, popping out her head.

"Oh, that is all right; go you long, no ting more, go way."

"Who's there?" I cried.

"Hold a your tongue," said Madame, imperiously, to the visitor, whose voice I fancied I recognised, "go way."

Out slipped Madame again, locking the door; but this time she returned immediately, bearing a tray with breakfast.

I think she fancied that I would perhaps attempt to break away and escape; but I had no such thought at that moment. She hastily set down the tray on the floor at the threshold, locking the door as before.

My share of breakfast was a little tea; but Madame's digestion was seldom disturbed by her sympathies, and she ate voraciously. During this process there was a silence unusual in her company; but when her meal was ended, she proposed a reconnaissance, professing much uncertainty as to whether my uncle had been arrested or not.

"And in case the poor old gentleman be poot in what you call stone jug, where are *we* to go, my dear Maud—to Knowl or to Elverston? You most direct."

And so she disappeared, turning the key in the door as before. It was an old custom of hers, locking herself in her room, and leaving the key in the lock, and the habit prevailed, for she left it there again.

With a heavy heart I completed my simple toilet, wondering all the while how much of Madame's story might be false and how much, if any true. Then I



looked out upon the dingy courtyard below, in its deep, damp shadow, and thought, "how could an assassin have scaled that height in safety, and entered so noiselessly, as not to awaken the slumbering gamester?" Then there were the iron bars across my window. What a fool had I been to object to that security?

I was labouring hard to reassure myself, and keep all ghastly suspicions at arms' length. But I wished that my room had been to the front of the house, with some view less dismal.

Lost in these ruminations of fear, as I stood at the window, I was startled by the sound of a sharp tread on the lobby, and by the key turning in the lock of my door.

In a panic I sprang back into the corner, and stood with my eyes fixed upon the door. It opened a little, and the black head of Meg Hawkes was introduced.

"Oh, Meg!" I cried; "thank God!"

"I guessed 'twas you, Miss Maud. I am feared, Miss."

The miller's daughter was pale, and her eyes, I thought, were red and swollen.

"Oh, Meg! for God's sake, what is it all?"

"I darn't come in. The old un's gone down, and locked the cross-door, and left me to watch. They think I care nout about ye, no more nor themselves. I donna know all, but summat more nor her. They tell her nout, she's so gi'n to drink; they say she's not safe, an' awful quarrelsome. I hear a deal when fayther and Master Dudley be a-talking in the mill. They think comin' in an out, I don't mind; but I put one thing an' t'other together. And don't ye eat nor drink nout here, Miss; hide away this; it's black



enough, but wholesome anyhow!" and she slipt a piece of a coarse loaf from under her apron. "*Hide* it mind. Drink nout but the water in the jug there — it's clean spring."

"Oh, Meg! oh, Meg! I know what you mean," said I, faintly.

"Ay, Miss, I'm feared they'll try it; they'll try to make away wi' ye somehow. I'm goin' to your friends arter dark; I darn't try it no sooner. I'll git awa to Ellerston, to your lady cousin, and I'll bring 'em back wi' me in a rin; so keep a good hairt, lass. Meg Hawkes will stan to ye. Ye were better to me than fayther and mother, and a'," and she clasped me round the waist, and buried her head in my dress; "an' I'll gie my life for ye, darling, and if they hurt ye I'll kill myself."

She recovered her sterner mood quickly. —

"Not a word lass," she said, in her old tone. "Don't ye try to git away — they'll *kill* ye — ye *can't* do't. Leave a' to me. It won't be, whatever it is, till two or three o'clock in the morning. I'll ha'e them a' here long afore, so keep a brave heart — there's a darling."

I suppose she heard, or fancied she heard a step approaching; for she said —

"Hish!"

Her pale, wild face vanished, the door shut quickly and softly, and the key turned again in the lock.

Meg, in her rude way, had spoken softly — almost under her breath; but no prophecy shrieked by the Pythoness ever thundered so madly in the ears of the hearer. I dare say that Meg fancied I was marvellously little moved by her words. I felt my gaze grow in-



tense, and my flesh and bones literally freeze. She did not know that every word she spoke seemed to burst like a blaze in my brain. She had delivered her frightful warning, and told her story coarsely and bluntly, which, in effect, means distinctly and concisely; and, I dare say, the announcement so made, like a quick, bold incision in surgery, was more tolerable than the slow, imperfect mangling, which falters, and recedes and equivocates with torture. Madame was long away. I sat down at the window, and tried to appreciate my dreadful situation. I was stupid — the imagery was all frightful; but I beheld it as we sometimes see horrors — heads cut off and houses burnt — in a dream, and without the corresponding emotions. It did not seem as if all this were really happening to me. I remember sitting at the window, and looking and blinking at the opposite side of the building, like a person unable, but striving, to see an object distinctly; and every minute pressing my hand to the side of my head and saying —

“Oh, it won't be — it won't be — oh, no! — never! — it could not be;” and in this stunned state Madame found me on her return.

But the valley of the shadow of death has its varieties of dread. The “horror of great darkness” is disturbed by voices, and illumed by sights. There are periods of incapacity and collapse, followed by paroxysms of active terror. Thus in my journey during those long hours I found it — agonies subsiding into lethargies, and these breaking again into frenzy. I sometimes wonder how I carried my reason safely through the ordeal.

Madame locked the door, and amused herself with



her own business, without minding me, humming little nasal snatches of French airs, as she smirked on her silken purchases displayed in the daylight. Suddenly it struck me that it was very dark, considering how early it was. I looked at my watch. It seemed to me a great effort of concentration to understand it. Four o'clock, it said. Four o'clock! It would be dark at five — *night* in one hour!

"Madame, what o'clock is it? Is it evening?" I cried with my hand to my forehead, like a person puzzled.

"Two, three minutes past four. It had five minutes to four when I came upstairs," answered she, without interrupting her examination of a piece of darned lace, which she was holding close to her eyes at the window.

"Oh, Madame! *Madame!* I'm frightened," cried I, with a wild and piteous voice, grasping her arm, and looking up, as shipwrecked people may their last to heaven, into her inexorable eyes. Madame looked frightened too, I thought, as she stared into my face. At last she said, rather angrily, and shaking her arm loose,

"What you mean, cheaile?"

"Oh save me, Madame! — oh, save me! oh, save me, Madame!" I pleaded, with the wild monotony of perfect terror, grasping and clinging to her dress, and looking up, with an agonized face, into the eyes of that shadowy Atropos.

"Save a you, indeed! Save! What *niaiserie!*"

"Oh, Madame! oh, *dear* Madame! for God's sake, only get me away — get me from this, and I'll do everything you ask me all my life — I will — *indeed*, Madame, I will! Oh, save me! save me! *save* me."



I was clinging to Madame as to my guardian angel in my agony.

"And who told you cheaile, you are in any danger?" demanded Madame, looking down on me, with a black and witch-like stare.

"I am, Madame — I am — in great danger! Oh, Madame, think of me — take pity on me. I have none to help me — there is no one but God and you!

Madame all this time viewed me with the same dismal stare, like a sorceress reading futurity in my face.

"Well, maybe you are — how can I tell? Maybe your uncle is mad — maybe you are mad. You have been my enemy always — why should I care?"

Again I burst into wild entreaty, and clasping her fast, poured forth my supplications with the bitterness of death.

"I have no confidence in you, little Maud; you are little rogue — petite traitresse! Reflect, if you can, how you 'av always treat Madame. You 'av attempt to ruin me — you conspire with the bad domestics at Knowl to destroy me; and you expect me here to take a your part! You would never listen to me — you 'ad no mercy for me — you join to hunt me away from your house like wolf. Well, what you expect to find me now? *Bah!*"

This terrific "bah," with a long, nasal yell of scorn, rang in my ears like a clap of thunder.

"I say you are mad, petite insolente, to suppose I should care for you more than the poor hare it will care for the hound — more than the bird who has escape will love the oiseleur. I do not care. I ought not care. It is your turn to suffer. Lie down on your bed there, and suffer quaitely."



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## Spiced Claret.

I DID not lie down; but I despaired. I walked round and round the room, wringing my hands in utter distraction. I threw myself at the bed-side on my knees. I could not pray. I could only shiver and moan, with hands clasped, and eyes of horror turned up to heaven. I think Madame was, in her malignant way, perplexed. That some evil was intended me I am sure she was persuaded; but I dare say Meg Hawkes had said rightly in telling me that she was not fully in their secrets.

The first paroxysm of despair subsided into another state. All at once my mind was filled with the idea of Meg Hawkes, her enterprise, and my chances of escape. There is one point at which the road to Elverston makes a short ascent: there is a sudden curve there, two great ash-trees with a road-side stile between, at the right side, covered with ivy. Driving back and forward, I did not recollect having particularly remarked this point in the highway; but now it was before me, in the thin light of the thinnest segment of moon, and the figure of Meg Hawkes, her back toward me, always ascending slowly toward Elverston. It was constantly the same picture, the same motion without progress, the same dreadful suspense and impatience.

I was now sitting on the side of the bed, looking wistfully across the room. When I did not see Meg



Hawkes, I beheld Madame darkly eyeing first one then another point of the chamber, evidently puzzling over some problem, and in one of her most savage moods — sometimes muttering to herself, sometimes protruding, and sometimes screwing up her great mouth.

She went into her own room, where she remained, I think, nearly ten minutes, and on her return there was that in the flash of her eyes, the glow of her face, and the peculiar fragrance that surrounded her, that showed she had been partaking of her favourite restorative.

I had not moved since she left my room.

She paused about the middle of the floor, and looked at me with what I can only describe as her wild-beast stare.

“You are a very secrete family, you Ruthyns, you are so coning; I hate the coning people. By my faith I weel see Mr. Silas Ruthyn, and ask wat he mean. I heard him tell old Wyat that Mr. Dudley is gone away to-night. He shall tell me everything, or else I will make echec et mat aussi vrai que je vis.”

Madame's words had hardly ceased, when I was again watching Meg Hawkes on the steep road, mounting, but never reaching, the top of the acclivity, on the way to Elverston, and mentally praying that she might be brought safely there. Vain prayer of an agonized heart! Meg's journey was already frustrated: she was not to reach Elverston in time.

Madame revisited her apartment, and returned, not, I think, improved in temper. She walked about the room, hustling the scanty furniture hither and thither as she encountered it. She kicked her empty box out of her way, with a horrid crash, and a curse in French.



She strode and swaggered round the room, muttering all the way, and turning the corners of her course with a furious whisk. At last, out of the door she went. I think she fancied she had not been sufficiently taken into confidence as to what was intended for me.

It was now growing late, and yet no succour! I was seized, I remember, with a dreadful icy shivering.

I was listening for signals of deliverance. At every distant sound, half stifled with a palpitation, these sounds piercing my ear with a horrible and exaggerated distinctness — “Oh, Meg! — Oh, Cousin Monica! — oh, come! Oh, Heaven, have mercy! — Lord, have mercy!” I thought I heard a roaring and jangle of voices. Perhaps it came from Uncle Silas’ room. It might be the tipsy violence of Madame. It might — merciful Heaven! — be the arrival of friends! I started to my feet. I listened, quivering with attention. Was it in my brain? — was it real? I was at the door, and it seemed to open of itself. Madame had forgot to lock it. She was losing her head a little by this time. The key stood in the gallery-door beyond. It, too, was open. I fled wildly. There was a subsiding sound of voices in my uncle’s room. I was, I know not how, on the lobby at the great stair-head outside my uncle’s apartment. My hand was on the banisters, my foot on the first step, when below me and against the faint light that glimmered through the great window on the landing, I saw a bulky human form ascending, and a voice said “Hush!” I staggered back, and, at that instant, fancied with a thrill of conviction, Lady Knollys’ voice in Uncle Silas’ room!

I don’t know how I entered the room; I was there like a ghost. I was frightened at my own state.



Lady Knollys was not there — no one but Madame and my guardian.

I can never forget the look that Uncle Silas fixed on me as he cowered, seemingly as appalled as I.

I think I must have looked like a phantom newly risen from the grave.

"What's that? — where do you come from?" whispered he.

"Death! death!" was my whispered answer as I froze with terror where I stood.

"What does she mean? — what does all this mean?" said Uncle Silas, recovering wonderfully, and turning with a withering sneer on Madame. "Do you think it right to disobey my plain directions, and let her run about the house at this hour?"

"Death! death! Oh, pray to God for you and me!" I whispered in the same dreadful tones.

My uncle stared strangely at me again; and after several horrible seconds, in which he seemed to have recovered himself, he said, sternly and coolly—

"You give too much place to your imagination, niece. Your spirits are in an odd state — you ought to have advice."

"Oh, uncle, pity me! Oh, uncle, you are good! you're kind; you're kind when you think. You could not — you could not — could not. Oh, think of your brother that was always so good to you. He sees me here. He sees us both. Oh, save me, uncle — save me — and I'll give up everything to you. I'll pray to God to bless you — I'll never forget your goodness and mercy. But don't keep me in doubt. If I'm to go, oh, for God's sake, shoot me now!"



"You were always odd, niece; I begin to fear you are insane," he replied, in the same stern, icy tone.

"Oh, uncle — oh! — am I? Am I *mad*?"

"I hope not; but you'll conduct yourself like a sane person if you wish to enjoy the privileges of one."

Then, with his finger pointing at me, he turned to Madame, and said, in a tone of suppressed ferocity—

"What's the meaning of this? — why is she here?"

Madame was gabbling volubly, but to me it was only a shrilly noise. My whole soul was concentrated in my uncle, the arbiter of my life, before whom I stood in the wildest agony of supplication.

That night was dreadful. The people I saw dizzily, made of smoke or shining vapour, smiling or frowning, I could have passed my hand through them. They were evil spirits.

"There's no ill intended you; by — there's none," said my uncle, for the first time violently agitated. "Madame told you why we've changed your room. You told her about the bailiffs, did not you?" with a stamp of fury he demanded of Madame, whose nasal roullades of talk were running on like an accompaniment all the time. She had told me indeed, only a few hours since, and now it sounded to me like the echo of something heard a month ago or more.

"You can't go about the house, d—n it, with bailiffs in occupation. There now. There's the whole thing. Get to your room, Maud, and don't vex me. There's a good girl."

He was trying to smile as he spoke these last words, and, with quavering soft tones, to quiet me; but the old scowl was there, the smile was corpse-like and



contorted, and the softness of his tones was more dreadful than another man's ferocity.

"There, Madame, she'll go quite gently, and you can call if you want help. Don't let it happen again."

"Come, Maud," said Madame, encircling, but not hurting my arm with her gripe, "let us go, my friend."

I did go, you will wonder, as well you may — as you may wonder at the docility with which strong men walk through the press-room to the drop, and thank the people of the prison for their civility when they bid them good-bye, and facilitate the fixing of the rope and adjusting of the cap. Have you never wondered that they don't make a last battle for life, with the unscrupulous energy of terror, instead of surrendering it so gently in cold blood, on a silent calculation, the arithmetic of despair?

I went up stairs with Madame like a somnambulist. I rather quickened my step as I drew near my room. I went in and stood, a phantom, at the window, looking into the dark quadrangle. A thin glimmering crescent hung in the frosty sky, and all heaven was strewn with stars. Over the steep roof at the other side spread on the dark azure of the night this glorious blazonry of the unfathomable Creator. To me a dreadful scroll — inexorable eyes. The cloud of cruel witnesses looking down in freezing brightness on my prayers and agonies.

I turned about and sat down, leaning my head upon my arms. Then, suddenly, I sat up, as for the first time the picture of Uncle Silas's littered room, and the travelling bags and black boxes piled on the floor by his table; the desk, hat-case, umbrella, coats, rugs, and mufflers, all ready for a journey, reached my brain



and suggested thought. The *mise en scène* had remained in every detail fixed upon my retina; and how I wondered — “When is he going — how soon? Is he going to carry me away and place me in a mad-house?”

“Am I — am I mad?” I began to think. “Is this all a dream, or is it real?”

I remembered how a thin, polite gentleman, with a tall grizzled head and a black velvet waistcoat, came into the carriage on our journey, and said a few words to me; how Madame whispered him something, and he murmured “Oh!” very gently, with raised eyebrows, and a glance at me, and thenceforward spoke no more to me, only to Madame, and at the next station carried his hat and other travelling chattels into another carriage. Had she told him I was mad?

These horrid bars! Madame always with me! The direful hints that dropt from my uncle! My own terrific sensations! All these evidences revolved in my brain, and presented themselves in turn like writings on a wheel of fire.

There came a knock to the door —

Oh, Meg! Was it she? No; old Wyat whispered Madame something about her room.

So Madame re-entered with a little silver tray and flagon in her hands, and a glass. Nothing came from Uncle Silas in ungentlemanlike fashion.

“Drink, Maud,” said Madame, raising the cover, and evidently enjoying the fragrant steam.

I could not. I might have done so had I been able to swallow anything — for I was too distracted to think of Meg’s warning.

Madame suddenly recollected her mistake of that evening, and tried the door; but it was duly locked.



She took the key from her pocket and placed it in her breast.

"You weel 'av these rooms to yourself, ma chère. I shall sleep down stairs to-night."

She poured out some of the hot claret into the glass abstractedly, and drank it off.

"'Tis very good — I drank without theenk. Bote 'tis very good. Why don't a you drink some?"

"I could not," I repeated. And Madame boldly helped herself.

"Vary polite, certally, to Madame was it to send nothing at all for *hair*" (so she pronounced "her"); "bote is all same thing. And so she ran on in her tipsy vein, which was loud and sarcastic, with a fierce laugh now and then.

Afterwards I heard that they were afraid of Madame, who was given to cross purposes, and violent in her cups. She had been noisy and quarrelsome downstairs. She was under the delusion that I was to be conveyed away that night to a remote and safe place, and she was to be handsomely compensated for services and evidence to be afterwards given. She was not to be trusted, however, with the truth. That was to be known but to three persons on earth.

I never knew, but I believe that the spiced claret which Madame drank was drugged. She was a person who could, I have been told, drink a great deal without exhibiting any change from it but an inflamed colour and furious temper. I can only state for certain what I saw, and that was, that shortly after she had finished the claret, she lay down upon my bed, and, I now know, fell asleep. I then thought she was *feigning* sleep only, and that she was really watching me.



About an hour after this I suddenly heard a little *clink* in the yard beneath. I peeped out, but saw nothing. The sound was repeated, however — sometimes more frequently, sometimes at long intervals. At last, in the deep shadow next the further wall, I thought I could discover a figure sometimes erect, sometimes stooping and bowing toward the earth. I could see this figure only in the rudest outline mingling with the dark.

Like a thunderbolt it smote my brain, "They are making my grave."

After the first dreadful stun, I grew quite wild, and ran up and down the room wringing my hands and gasping prayers to heaven. Then a calm stole over me — such a dreadful calm as I could fancy glide over one who floated in a boat under the shadow of the "Traitors' Gate," leaving life, and hope, and trouble behind.

Shortly after there came a very low tap at my door; then another, like a tiny post-knock. I could never understand why it was I made no answer. Had I done so, and thus shown that I was awake, it might have sealed my fate. I was standing in the middle of the floor staring at the door, which I expected to see open and admit I knew not what troop of spectres.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

## The Hour of Death.

It was a very still night and frosty. My candle had long burnt out. There was still a faint moonlight, which fell in a square of yellow on the floor near the window, leaving the rest of the room in what, to an eye less accustomed than mine had become to that faint light, would have been total darkness. Now, I am sure, I heard a soft whispering outside my door. I knew that I was in a state of siege! The crisis was come, and, strange to say, I felt myself grow all at once resolute and self-possessed. It was not a subsidence, however, of the dreadful excitement, but a sudden screwing up of my nerves to a pitch such as I cannot describe.

I suppose the people outside moved with great caution; and the perfect solidity of the floor, which had not anywhere a creaking board in it, favoured their noiseless movements. It was well for me that there were in the house three persons whom it was part of their plan to mystify respecting my fate. This alone compelled the extreme caution of their proceedings. They suspected that I had placed furniture against the door, and were afraid to force it, lest a crash, a scream, perhaps a long and shrilly struggle, might follow.

I remained for a space which I cannot pretend to estimate in the same posture, afraid to stir — afraid to move my eye from the door.



A very peculiar grating sound above my head startled me from my watch — something of the character of sawing, only more crunching, and with a faint, continued rumble in it — utterly inexplicable. It sounded over that portion of the roof which was furthest from the door, toward which I now glided; and as I took my stand under cover of the projecting angle of a clumsy old press that stood close by it, I perceived the room a little darkened, and I saw a man descend and take his stand upon the window-stone. He let go a rope, which, however, was still fast round his body, and employed both his hands, with apparently some exertion, about something at the side of the window, which in a moment more, in one mass, bars and all, swung noiselessly open, admitting the frosty night air, and the man, whom I now distinctly saw to be Dudley Ruthyn, kneeled on the sill, and stept, after a moment's listening, into the room. His foot made no sound upon the floor; his head was bare, and he wore his usual short shooting jacket.

I cowered to the ground in my post of observation. He stood, as it seemed to me, irresolutely for a moment, and then drew from his pocket an instrument which I distinctly saw against the faint moonlight. Imagine a hammer, one end of which had been beaten out into a longish tapering spike, with a handle something longer than usual. He drew stealthily to the window, and seemed to examine this hurriedly, and tested its strength with a twist or two of his hand. And then he adjusted it very carefully in his grasp, and made two or three little experimental picks with it in the air.

I remained perfectly still, with a terrible com-



posure, crouched in my hiding-place, my teeth clenched, and prepared to struggle like a tigress for my life when discovered. I thought his next measure would be to light a match. I saw a lantern, I fancied, on the window-sill. But this was not his plan. He stole, in a groping way, which seemed strange to me, who could distinguish objects in this light, to the side of my bed, the exact position of which he evidently knew; he stooped over it. Madame was breathing in the deep respiration of heavy sleep. Suddenly, but softly, he laid, as it seemed to me, his left hand over her face, and nearly at the same instant there came a scrunching blow; an unnatural shriek, beginning small and swelling for two or three seconds into a yell such as are imagined in haunted houses, accompanied by a convulsive sound, as of the motion of running, and the arms drumming on the bed; and then another blow — and with a horrid gasp he recoiled a step or two, and stood perfectly still. I heard a horrible tremor quivering through the joints and curtains of the bedstead, the convulsion of the murdered woman. It was a dreadful sound, like the shaking of a tree and rustling of leaves. Then once more he stepped to the side of the bed, and I heard another of those horrid blows — and silence — and another — and more silence — and the diabolical surgery was ended. For a few seconds, I think, I was on the point of fainting; but a gentle stir outside the door, close to my ear, startled me, and proved that there had been a watcher posted outside. There was a little tapping at the door.

“Who’s that?” whispered Dudley, hoarsely.

“A friend,” answered a sweet voice.

And a key was introduced, the door quickly un-



locked, and Uncle Silas entered. I saw that frail, tall, white figure, the venerable silver locks that resembled those upon the honoured head of John Wesley, and his thin white hand, the back of which hung so close to my face that I feared to breathe. I could see his fingers twitching nervously. The smell of perfumes and of ether entered the room with him.

Dudley was trembling now like a man in an ague-fit.

"Look what you made me do!" he said, maniacally.

"Steady, sir!" said the old man, close beside me.

"Yes, you damned old murderer; I've a mind to do for you."

"There, Dudley, like a dear boy, don't give way; it's done. Right or wrong we can't help it. You must be quiet," said the old man, with a stern gentleness.

Dudley groaned.

"Whoever advised it, you're a gainer, Dudley," said Uncle Silas.

Then there was a pause.

"I hope that was not heard," said Uncle Silas.

Dudley walked to the window and stood there.

"Come, Dudley, you and Hawkes must use expedition. You know you must get that out of the way."

"I've done too much. I won't do nout. I'll not touch it. I wish my hand was off first. I wish I was a soger. Do as ye like, you an' Hawkes. I won't go nigh it; damn ye both — and *that!*" and he hurled the hammer with all his force upon the floor.

"Come, come, be reasonable, Dudley, dear boy.



There's nothing to fear but your own folly. You won't make a noise?"

"Oh, oh, my God!" said Dudley, hoarsely, and he wiped his forehead with his open hand.

"There now, you'll be all well in a minute," continued the old man.

"You said 'twouldn't hurt her. If I'd a known she'd a screeched like that I'd never a done it. 'Twas a damn lie. You're the damndest villain on earth."

"Come, Dudley!" said the old man under his breath, but very sternly, "make up your mind. If you don't choose to go on, it can't be helped; only it's a pity you began. For *you* it is a good deal — it does not much matter for *me*."

"Ay, for *you*!" echoed Dudley, through his set teeth. "The old talk!"

"Well, sir," snarled the old man, in the same low tones, "you should have thought of all this before. It's only taking leave of the world a year or two sooner; but a year or two's something. I'll leave you to do as you please."

"Stop, will you? Stop here. I know its a fixt thing now. If a fella does a thing he's damned for, you might let him talk a bit anyhow. I don't care much if I was shot."

"There now — *there* — just stick to that, and don't run off again. There's a box and a bag here, we must change the direction, and take them away. The box has some jewels. Can you see them? I wish we had a light."

"No, I'd rather not; I can see well enough. I wish we were out o' this. *Here's* the box."



"Pull it to the window," said the old man, to my inexpressible relief advancing at last a few steps.

Coolness was given me in that dreadful moment; and I knew that all depended on my being prompt and resolute. I stood up swiftly. I often thought if I had happened to wear silk instead of the cachmere I had on that night, its rustle would have betrayed me.

I distinctly saw the tall stooping figure of my uncle, and the outline of his venerable tresses, as he stood between me and the dull light of the window, like a shape cut out in card.

He was saying "just to *there*," and pointing with his long arm at that contracting patch of moonlight which lay squared upon the floor. The door was about a quarter open, and just as Dudley began to drag Madame's heavy box, with my jewel case in it, across the floor from her room, inhaling a great breath — with a mental prayer for help — I glided on tiptoe from the room, and found myself on the gallery floor.

I turned to my right, simply by chance, and followed a long gallery in the dark, not running — I was too fearful of making the least noise — but walking with the tiptoe-swiftness of terror. At the termination of this was a cross gallery, one end of which, that to my left, terminated in a great window, through which the dusky night-view was visible. With the instinct of terror I chose the darker, and turned again to my right: hurrying through this long and nearly dark passage I was terrified by a light about thirty feet before me, emerging from the ceiling. In spotted patches this light fell through the door and sides of a



stable lantern, and showed me a ladder, down which, from an open skylight, I suppose, for the cool night-air floated in my face, came Dickon Hawkes, notwithstanding his maimed condition, with so much celerity as to leave me hardly a moment for consideration.

He sat on the last round of the ladder, and tightened the straps of his wooden leg.

At my left was a door-case open, but no door. I entered; it was a short passage about six feet long, leading perhaps to a back-stair, but the door at the end was locked.

I was forced to stand in this recess, then, which afforded no shelter, while Pegtop stumped by with his lantern in his hand. I fancy he had some idea of listening to his master unperceived, for he stopped close to my hiding-place, blew out the candle, and pinched the long snuff with his horny finger and thumb.

Having listened for a few seconds, he stumped stealthily along the gallery which I had just traversed, and turned the corner in the direction of the chamber where the crime had just been committed, and the discovery was impending. I could see him against the broad window which in the day-time lighted this long passage, and the moment he had passed the corner I resumed my flight.

I descended a stair corresponding with that back stair, as I am told, up which Madame had led me only the night before. I tried the outer door. To my wild surprise it was open. In a moment I was upon the step, in the free air, and as instantaneously was seized by the arm in the gripe of a man.



It was Tom Brice, who had already betrayed me, and who was now in surtout and hat, waiting to drive the carriage with the guilty father and son from the scene of their abhorred outrage.





## CHAPTER XXX.

In the Oak Parlour.

So it was vain — I was trapped, and all was over.

I stood before him on the step, the white moon shining on my face. I was trembling so that I wonder I could stand, my helpless hands raised towards him, and I looking up in his face. A long, shuddering moan — “Oh — oh! — oh!” was all I uttered.

The man, still holding my arm, looked, I thought, frightened, into my white, dumb face.

Suddenly he said, in a wild, fierce whisper —  
“Never say another word.” (I had not uttered one).  
“They shan’t hurt ye, Miss; git ye in, I don’t care a damn!”

It was an uncouth speech. To me it was the voice of an angel. With a burst of gratitude that sounded in my own ears like a laugh, I thanked God for those blessed words.

In a moment more he had placed me in the carriage, and almost instantly we were in motion — very cautiously while crossing the court, until he had got the wheels upon the grass, and then at a rapid pace, improving his speed as the distance increased. He drove along the side of the back approach to the house, keeping on the grass; so that our progress, though swaying like that of a ship in a swell, was very nearly as noiseless.



The gate had been left unlocked — he swung it open, and remounted the box. And we were now beyond the spell of Bartram-Haugh, thundering — Heaven be praised! — along the Queen's highway, right in the route to Elverston. It was literally a gallop. Through the chariot windows I saw Tom stand as he drove, and every now and then throw an awful glance over his shoulder. Were we pursued? Never was agony of prayer like mine, as with clasped hands and wild stare I gazed through the windows on the road, whose trees, and hedges, and gabled cottages, were chasing one another backward at so giddy a speed.

We were now ascending that identical steep with the giant ash-trees at the right and the stile between, which my vision of Meg Hawkes had presented all that night, when my excited eye detected a running figure within the hedge. I saw the head of some one crossing the stile in pursuit, and heard Brice's name shrieked.

"Drive on — on — on!" I screamed.

But Brice pulled up. I was on my knees on the floor of the carriage, with clasped hands, expecting capture, when the door opened, and Meg Hawkes, pale as death, her cloak drawn over her black tresses, looked in.

"Oh! — ho! — ho! — thank God!" she screamed.

"Shake hands, lass. Tom, yer a good un! He's a good lad, Tom."

"Come in, Meg — you must sit by me," I said, recovering all at once.

Meg made no demur. Take my hand, I said, offering mine to her disengaged one.



"I can't, Miss — my arm's broke."

And so it was, poor thing! She had been espied and overtaken in her errand of mercy for me, and her ruffian father had felled her with his cudgel, and then locked her into the cottage, whence, however, she had contrived to escape, and was now flying to Elverston, having tried in vain to get a hearing in Feltram, whose people had been for hours in bed.

The door being shut upon Meg, the steaming horses were instantly at a gallop again.

Tom was still watching as before, with many an anxious glance to rearward, for pursuit. Again he pulled up, and came to the window.

"Oh, what is it?" cried I.

"But that letter, Miss; I couldn't help. 'Twas Dickon, he found it in my pocket. That's a'."

"Oh, yes! — no matter — thank you — thank Heaven! Are we near Elverston?"

"'Twill be a mile, Miss: and please'm to mind I had no finger in't."

"Thanks — thank you — you're very good — I shall *always* thank you, Tom, as long as I live!"

At length we entered Elverston. I think I was half wild. I don't know how I got into the hall. I was in the oak-parlour, I believe, when I saw Cousin Monica. I was standing, my arms extended. I could not speak; but I ran with a loud, long scream into her arms. I forget a great deal after that.



## CONCLUSION.

Oh, my beloved Cousin Monica! Thank Heaven, you are living still; and younger, I think, than I in all things but in years.

And Milly, my dear companion, she is now the happy wife of that good little clergyman, Sprigge Biddlepen. It has been in my power to be of use to them, and he shall have the next presentation to Dawling.

Meg Hawkes, proud and wayward, and the most affectionate creature on earth, was married to Tom Brice a few months after these events; and as both wished to emigrate, I furnished them with the capital; and I am told they are likely to be rich. I hear from my kind Meg often; and she seems very happy.

My dear old friends, Mary Quince and Mrs. Rusk, are, alas! growing old, but living with me, and very happy. And after long solicitation, I persuaded Doctor Bryerly, the best and truest of ministers, with my dearest friend's concurrence, to undertake the management of the Derbyshire estates. In this I have been most fortunate. He is the very person for such a charge — so punctual, so laborious, so kind, and so shrewd.

In compliance with medical advice, Cousin Monica hurried me away to the Continent, where she would never permit me to allude to the terrific scenes which remain branded so awfully on my brain. It needed



no constraint. It is a sort of agony to me even now to think of them.

The plan was craftily devised. Neither old Wyat nor Giles, the butler, had a suspicion that I had returned to Bartram. Had I been put to death, the secret of my fate would have been deposited in the keeping of four persons only — the two Ruthyns, Hawkes, and ultimately Madame. My dear Cousin Monica had been artfully led to believe in my departure for France, and prepared for my silence. Suspicion might not have been excited for a year after my death; and then would never, in all probability, have pointed to Bartram as the scene of the crime. The weeds would have grown over me, and I should have lain in that deep grave where the corpse of Madame de la Rougierre was unearthed in the darksome quadrangle of Bartram-Haugh.

It was more than two years after that I heard what had befallen at Bartram after my flight. Old Wyat, who went early to Uncle Silas' room, to her surprise, for he had told her that he was that night to accompany his son, who had to meet the mail train to Derby at five o'clock in the morning, saw her old master lying on the sofa, much in his usual position.

"There was nout much strange about him," old Wyat said; "but that his scent bottle was spilt, on its side, over on the table, and he dead."

She thought he was not quite cold when she found him, and she sent the old butler for Doctor Jolks, who said he died of too much "loddlum."

Of my wretched uncle's religion what am I to say? Was it utter hypocrisy, or had it at any time a vein of sincerity in it? I cannot say. I don't believe that



he had any heart left for religion, which is the highest form of affection, to take hold of. Perhaps he was a sceptic with misgivings about the future, but past the time for finding anything reliable in it. The devil approached the citadel of his heart by stealth, with many zigzags and parallels. The idea of marrying me to his son by fair means, then by foul; and when that wicked chance was gone, then the design of seizing all by murder, supervened. I dare say that Uncle Silas thought for a while that he was a righteous man. He wished to have Heaven and to escape Hell, if there were such places. But there were other things whose existence was not speculative, of which some he coveted, and some he dreaded more, and temptation came. "Now if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." There comes with old age a time when the heart is no longer fusible or malleable, and must retain the form in which it has cooled down. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; he which is filthy, let him be filthy still."

Dudley had disappeared; but in one of her letters, Meg, writing from her Australian farm, says — "There's a fella in toon as calls hiself Colbroke, wi' a good hoose o' wood, 15 foot length, and as hy 'bout as silling o' the pearler o' Bartram — only lots o' rats, they do say, my lady — a bying and sellin' of goold back and forred wi' the diggin foke and the marchants. His chick and mouth be wry wi' scar o' burns or vitterel, an' no wiskers, bless you; but my Tom ee tolt



him he knowed him for Master Doodley. I ant seed him; but he sade ad shute Tom soon is look at 'im, an' denide it, wi' moathful o' curses and oaf. Tom baint right shure; if I seed un wons i'd no for sartin; but 'appen, 'twil best be let be." This was all.

Old Hawkes stood his ground, relying on the profound cunning with which their actual proceedings had been concealed even from the suspicions of the two inmates of the house, and on the mystery that habitually shrouded Bartram-Haugh and all its belongings from the eyes of the outer world.

Strangely enough, he fancied that I had made my escape long before the room was entered, and even if he were arrested, there was no evidence he was certain, to connect *him* with the murder, all knowledge of which, he would stoutly deny.

There was an inquest on the body of my uncle, and Dr. Jolks was the chief witness. They found that his death was caused by "an excessive dose of laudanum, accidentally administered by himself."

It was not until nearly a year after the dreadful occurrences at Bartram that Dickon Hawkes was arrested on a very awful charge, and placed in gaol. It was an old crime, committed in Lancashire, that had found him out. After his conviction, as a last chance, he tried a disclosure of all the circumstances of the unsuspected death of the Frenchwoman. Her body was discovered buried, where he indicated, in the inner court of Bartram-Haugh, and, after due legal inquiry, was interred in the churchyard of Feltram.

Thus I escaped the horrors of the witness-box, or the far worse torture of a dreadful secret.

Doctor Bryerly, shortly after Lady Knollys had



described to him the manner in which Dudley entered my room, visited the house of Bartram-Haugh, and minutely examined the windows of the room in which Mr. Charke had slept on the night of his murder. One of these he found provided with powerful steel hinges, very craftily sunk and concealed in the timber of the window-frame, which was secured by an iron pin outside, and swung open on its removal. This was the room in which they had placed me, and this the contrivance by means of which the room had been entered. The problem of Mr. Charke's murder was solved.

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I have penned it. I sit for a moment breathless. My hands are cold and damp. I rise with a great sigh, and look out on the sweet green landscape and pastoral hills, and see the flowers and birds, and the waving boughs of glorious trees — all images of liberty and safety; and as the tremendous nightmare of my youth melts into air, I lift my eyes in boundless gratitude to the God of all comfort, whose mighty hand and outstretched arm delivered me. When I lower my eyes and unclasp my hands, my cheeks are wet with tears. A tiny voice is calling me "Mamma!" and a beloved smiling face, with his dear father's silken brown tresses, peeps in.

"Yes, darling, our walk. Come away!"

I am Lady Ilbury, happy in the affection of a beloved and noble-hearted husband. The shy, useless girl you have known is now a mother — trying to be a good one; and this, the last pledge, has lived.

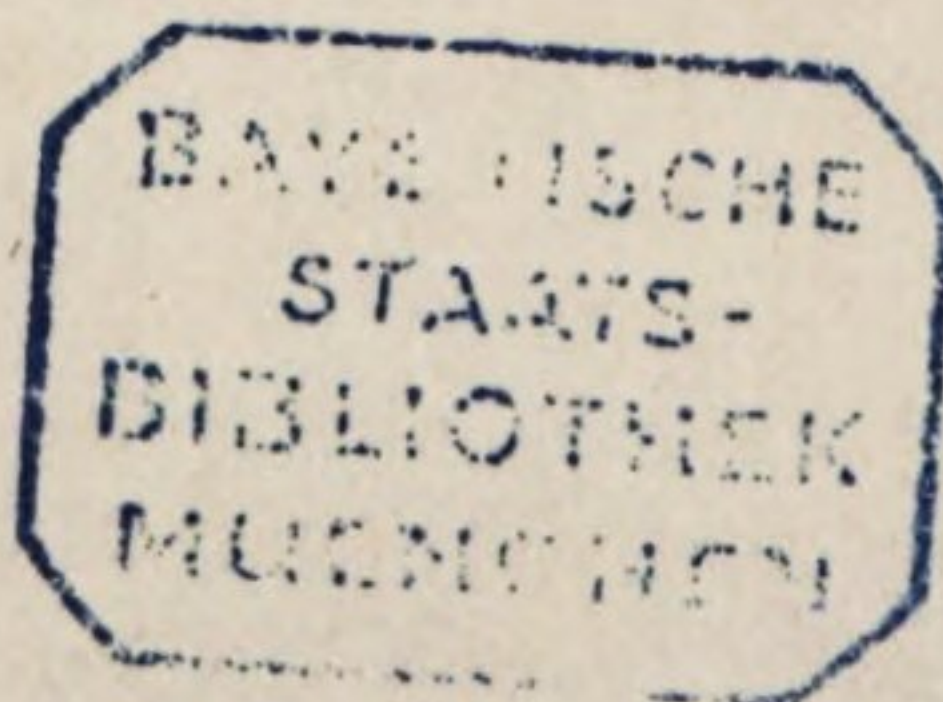
I am not going to tell of sorrows — how brief has



been my pride of early maternity, or how beloved were those whom the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. But sometimes as, smiling on my little boy, the tears gather in my eyes, and he wonders, I can see, why they come. I am thinking — and trembling while I smile, to think — how strong is love, how frail is life; and rejoicing while I tremble, that in the deathless love of those who mourn, the Lord of Life, who never gave a pang in vain, conveys the sweet and ennobling promise of a compensation by eternal reunion. So, through my sorrows, I have heard a voice from heaven say, "Write, from henceforth blessed are the dead that die in the Lord."

This world is a parable — the habitation of symbols — the phantoms of spiritual things immortal shown in material shape. May the blessed second-sight be mine — to recognise under these beautiful forms of earth the ANGELS who wear them; for I am sure we may walk with them if we will, and hear them speak.

THE END.





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